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AN EXAMINATION OF THE NEWSPAPER NEWSROOM STAFF  
AS A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

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by

Phyllis Winder Gilbert

September 1995



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AS A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

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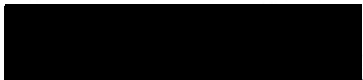
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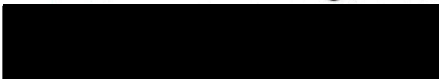
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## ABSTRACT

Composition scholars from Emig to Flower and Hays have been concerned with the writing process, seeking to discover what mental functions prompt research, planning, drafting and revision. Others have been just as concerned with what goes on *around* the writer, assessing what effect the classroom or professional community has on the writer's efforts. This latter group has sometimes looked at a concept called "the discourse community," or the individuals and culture which not only surround and inspire a writer, but which, as a community, sets standards and shares communication goals with the writer. Many academic and a few non-academic discourse communities have been studied, but no one has scrutinized a newspaper newsroom or editorial staff as a working discourse community.

The Press-Enterprise in Riverside, California, became the research site for this study. This daily newspaper uses the talents of well over 100 writers and editors in each edition's composition; they form a discourse community which shares industry conventions (e.g. a journalistic style, deadlines) but has also evolved its own language, style, and ways of communicating. By studying the way the newsroom works to produce its daily news output in general, and one story in particular, its unique characteristics have been identified and analyzed. Each helps explain the way this discourse community functions, and the way its individual members learn to work within it.

Within the working habits of a newspaper discourse community are strategies which have value for the classroom, especially the community's use of revision as a necessary part of the writing process.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this thesis taught me the value of a discourse community. Without a committed committee, an understanding family and a long-suffering newspaper staff, I would never have put the first, let alone the last, word on paper. Each of these as individuals gave me strength—spiritual, professional, mental sustenance—and taken together, were both my external and internal voices of persuasion, encouragement and skepticism.

Specifically, I am grateful to my principal reader, Dian Pizurie who listened to my tentative ideas and helped me find a focus within them, and to readers Ted Ruml and Dolores Tanno, who brought to their tasks both enthusiasm and toughness.

I appreciate my sons and daughters-in-law who patiently listened as I tried to tell them what I wanted to do, and whether they shared my final vision or not, told me I could do it.

My husband was not only a daily confidant and cheerleader, but a technical wizard. He refused to admit a computer problem was unsolvable, and thereby allowed me to put these words and thoughts in professional form. He gave—and gives—me a loving foundation to pursue and achieve my educational goals.

For The Press-Enterprise, where I was accepted as a researcher, I have special thanks: The editors, reporters and support staff welcomed me, never said “no” to a request, however outrageous, and gave me large doses of time and energy. I will always be grateful for their gifts.

My discourse community is big, and each of its members has played a valuable role in this study. To each and all, I give thanks.

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## INTRODUCTION

As I let the hot water pound my shoulders, a movement on the wall caught my eye: a stomach with wiry legs crawled across the tiled surface. I was sharing the shower with a spider. A thought just as fleeting as the spider's passage crossed my mind "How will I tell my husband about this?"

A trail of thoughts followed. What would I say to my sweaty exercise classmates in line for the shower? How could I use the spider as an illustration of a metaphor in a composition class? How would I phrase the story for my niece whose admiration of Charlotte is boundless? How would I tell my son the ecologist? Or my son the philosopher? If at church, would I talk about God's creature the spider and how its journey into my life had a spiritual meaning? How would I put the incident in my journal? What if I were still a newspaper writer? Could I fit it into a feature story?

This list of questions is more than a mental inventory of situations, listeners and readers; it reveals the number of discourse communities of which I am a member. I study and teach English composition; my colleagues and students represent two discourse communities. I am a mother, wife, daughter, sister-in-law, grandmother; my family is another discourse community. I am a former newspaper writer, an alumna of three colleges, a member of a church; each of these spheres presents a different set of communication criteria. When considering the spider as the subject of an anecdote in conversation or writing, those groups with whom I use different vocabulary or format become visible, vocal crowds in my mind. My expression would be molded, developed, given meaning by a community with whom I ultimately decided to share those ten seconds. More importantly, the incident was framed and ready to be delivered in accord

with my internalized expectations of that discourse community.

The way we interact within discourse communities is a topic for English composition scholars to observe and analyze. In 1982, Patricia Bizzell opened the topic to renewed debate when she linked it directly to cognitive explanations of the writing process, saying both an inside-out and an outside-in analysis were necessary to fully understand the way writers work. In 1989, Linda Flower—whose own work on a writer's cognitive process has been seminal—recognized and called for research into the connection between cognition and context—and context is what a discourse community encompasses.



## Discourse Communities

The conversation about discourse communities (and/or interpretive communities, speech communities, writing/learning communities and communities of knowledgeable peers) ebbs and flows, growing into intense debate at times and then becoming silent when other topics claim attention. Patricia Bizzell's article "Cognition, Convention and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing" re-opened the discussion in 1982. In the last decade researchers Cooper, Berkenkotter, et al; LeFevre; Sperling; Hare and Fitzsimmons; Bruffee, and Harris, among others, have defined and redefined the concept's significance to the way students learn to write.

Discourse communities never completely disappear from the study of composition perhaps because of the human appeal embodied in the term "community." Researchers approach the act of composition from at least two perspectives: what happens inside the writer and what happens outside. Cognitive researchers (e.g. Emig, Flower and Hayes) observing a writer at work, typically have asked the writer to write, and at the same time, narrate his/her thinking. The success of this approach is limited by an individual's ability to do two things at once, and by the inherent difficulty of naming the pieces of what is a complex mental process. Mystery still clouds our knowledge of the inside-the-brain work: how much of a writer's response to an assignment is experience? How much intuition? How much interpretation? Flower and Hayes' 1981 model identifies "task environment" both as "the rhetorical problem" and "text produced so far" which interact with the cognitive writing processes. Since the "rhetorical problem" generally is communicated from outside—e.g. a classroom assignment, an employer's request for a proposal, a social factor can also be said to be part of

the task environment.

It is a desire to understand how that social factor, the outside-the-writer context, affects the writing process that has led composition scholars to observe writers at work in a community. Academic discourse communities have been scrutinized by a multitude of researchers (see previously cited list), but a significant number have also gone off campus (among them Freed and Broadhead [1987], Odell and Goswami [1985], Matalene [1989]). Their studies of corporations as discourse communities have offered insight into the way businesses shape writing and writers. Yet composition scholars have paid little attention to a discourse community whose product is written, public and familiar—the daily newspaper. In many ways a corporate environment, a newspaper differs from IBM or U. S. Steel in that its product is writing. A newspaper's news-gathering and writing staff is a functioning discourse community, possessing its own vocabulary, a shared interest and common purpose.

I spent twenty years writing for a newspaper before entering the composition classroom. I have a working knowledge of a newspaper's systems and philosophies; but more importantly, I have a composition student's curiosity about why it works the way it does. To that end, I have analyzed the newsroom of The Press-Enterprise (Riverside, California daily metropolitan newspaper of 160,000 circulation) as a discourse community. My conclusions are based not only on my personal experience as an editor and writer of special sections, but upon more recent observation and interviews in the Press-Enterprise newsroom specifically as a student of discourse communities.

The production and corporate headquarters of the Press-Enterprise are in Riverside, but it also staffs nine county offices (bureaus) with news, circulation



and advertising personnel. According to president and executive editor Marcia McQuern, the editorial department is authorized 208 news positions divided among three geographically separate newsrooms in Riverside and the nine county offices. The personnel include full and part-time reporters, editors, photographers, graphic artists, librarians, clerical and support staff. The city news reporting staff numbers twenty; there are double that (41) in the county. In addition, in Riverside, there are sixteen business and features reporters, seven writers on special assignments, and ten sports writers. Copy, news, special and managing editors in Riverside total well over 60 divided between news (35), business and features (17), sports (11), an editorial page editor who works with three editorial writers and two photo editors. News assistants handle many mundane newsroom chores as support staff, engaging in a limited amount of both reporting and editing. In the summer, a cadre of interns works as reporters, editors, artists and photographers. The Press-Enterprise generally hires reporters with substantial and progressively challenging experience which may include working for a college newspaper, a weekly and finally, a daily newspaper.

This diverse group focuses its energy on gathering and writing news (a shared purpose). To achieve that goal, it speaks a language filled with codes and jargon—a specialized vocabulary which it uses not only to discuss writing, but to facilitate its editing and technical production. It also applies industry and local standards (conventions) to its work, and its repetitive nature creates familiar formulae by which writers respond to assigned writing tasks. The writers and editors who form this community are not silent, isolated writers. These factors identify the newsroom as a discourse community. And examined as a discourse community, the newsroom yields valuable insights into the way writers interact

both as speakers and writers; in particular, it demonstrates the way this discourse community both encourages and expects revision and rewriting.

To an extent, my study was prompted by Richard C. Freed and Glenn J. Broadhead's examination of corporate discourse communities (1987) in which they identified concerns for their own and future research. Because, they argue, "both overtly and tacitly, these communities establish paradigms that discourses adhere to . . ." (156), they focus on two main concerns: first, the writer's relationship to his/her discourse community, and second, defining and describing how the community functions and influences the writing. I have also been motivated by my own need to understand how the cognitive process within a writer's mind combines with the outside social activity that demands, inspires and evaluates his/her writing.

Linda Flower's theories (1989) about the way context cues cognition form a useful outline to guide my observations. Flower's assertions are that:

Cognitive action is often initiated in response to a cue from the environment . . . Context guides cognition in multiple ways . . . Context selectively taps knowledge and triggers specific processes . . . Context also guides action by setting the criteria by which a text or even one's own thinking process is monitored and evaluated . . . Finally, context cues action by suggesting appropriate strategies (287-88).

The paradigms, the values, the vocabulary and the routine of a discourse community can help or hinder a writer's work. These are the factors I examined in the newsroom, not only to see how they influence general response to writing

assignments, but specifically, how revision is accomplished.

The written representation of this examination is divided into five chapters: first a definition of discourse communities in general; second, a look at the way a newsroom fits and occupies its own niche as a discourse community; third, revision and editing considered both as classroom and newsroom concepts; fourth, one newspaper story traced from the reporter's first consideration of the assignment to its final editing; and last, conclusions and implications for the composition classroom.

## CHAPTER 1

### DISCOURSE COMMUNITY DEFINED

What is a discourse community? The range of definitions for discourse communities is broad. Culture, shared language and purpose, influence, values—all may be included in definitions of the discourse community and its function as the social factor (context, task environment) in composition. But for the purposes of this discussion, a discourse community is defined as a group with a shared purpose for its use of specialized language and conventions. Each discourse community creates and adheres to norms and standards, expectations and genres. Further, these conventions enable a discourse community's members to accomplish specific communication tasks efficiently. This definition is based not only on my observations of both classroom and newspaper discourse communities, but on the writings and observations of a number of scholars whose work is examined here.

James Porter's is one of the most succinct definitions of the term: "A 'discourse community' is a group of individuals bound by a common interest who communicate through approved channels and whose discourse is regulated" (qtd. Cooper 204). Nice, neat—but Porter's definition is only a beginning. Patricia Bizzell (1982) elaborates in a thorough and thought-provoking study of the role of discourse communities, first looking at the way individuals learn to use language:

The mature exercise of these thought and language capacities takes place in society, in interaction with other individuals, and this interaction modifies the individual's reasoning, speaking

and writing within society. Groups of society members can become accustomed to modifying each other's reasoning and language use in certain ways. Eventually these familiar ways achieve the status of conventions that bind the group in a discourse community, at work together on some project of interaction with the material world (214).

Bizzell, investigating "inner-directed" and "outer-directed" explanations of the way writers think and use language, asserts that the study of both theoretical spheres is needed "if we wish to have a complete picture of the composing process. We need to explain the cognitive and the social factors in writing development, and even more important, the relationship between them" (218).

Bizzell regards the discourse community as a logical place to uncover the relationship. In looking for a link between inner-directed and outer-directed theories she examines Vygotsky's thought-to-language ideas and Flower and Hayes' composition process model. Bizzell sees flaws in each; neither has shown the whole writing picture. Since Bizzell cannot find a way to separate the speaker or writer from a context—" . . . finding words is always a matter of aligning oneself with a particular discourse community" (226) and "writing is always already writing for some purpose that can only be understood in its community context" (227)—she returns to the discourse community. As she observes, we learn language by interacting with society—family members, playmates, teachers—and eventually, communicate with those groups in significantly different ways. To see the effects of Bizzell's discourse community, visualize five-year-old John who learns in kindergarten to put his hand up when he wants

to ask a question; at home, he simply goes to a parent or sibling and speaks. Putting up a hand at home would be inappropriate; not putting up a hand at school is inappropriate. The child learns through a discourse community (kindergarten, family) which conventions to use. As we mature, our discourse conventions become progressively more sophisticated. Now picture Joan as a seventh grader posing as her own parent in a note to the attendance office explaining the previous day's absence. If the child understands the conventions adults use in this situation, she'll avoid saying "I was absent today because . . . " or signing it "Joan's mother." Thus the discourse community provides context, rules, vocabulary and motivation for writing. It can also provide a place for composition scholars to study not only the writer, but his/her context. Bizzell notes that this context changes; we all belong to more than one discourse community (214). And within each, the conventions change (226); technology provides new ways to communicate (e.g. computers vs. typewriters, fax machines vs. mail), and the needs of the members of the group change (we age in a family; we become more knowledgeable in a classroom). Bizzell's first question (what do we need to know about writing) is a pedagogical one: how can we as composition instructors put what we know about how students write to work helping them grow as writers? She believes it's a matter of "emphasiz[ing] not only discourse but also community" so that students' basic abilities to use language can be foundations for more sophisticated and confident use within the academic community—and those communities they will join later as members of professions (239).

Joseph Harris (1989) adds to and refines Bizzell's definition, visualizing the discourse community as the shaper of ideas and the limiter of ideas:



We write not as isolated individuals but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns and practices *both instigate and constrain*, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions in writing are thus not merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong (12; italics mine).

In developing his argument that by sharing distinct values discourse communities impose certain limitations on discourse, and therefore on individuals within their boundaries, Harris refers to David Bartholomae's oft-quoted essay "Inventing the University" (1985). Bartholomae describes a student's plight entering academia and finding its discourse only vaguely familiar. The words may be in the language the student has heard since birth, but the way they are used, combined, structured and evaluated is new and challenging. The student discovers that as writers we are not only compelled to leave familiar discourse communities to which we have belonged either by birth or choice, but to work our way into those that are foreign (13). While the term "community" may suggest an inclusive nature, it is also exclusive. An individual, Harris implies, feels pressure to conform to written and spoken conventions in order to be accepted by a discourse community, in effect, having to adopt the group's paradigms to become a member. But however great an obstacle this may pose, motivated students are usually able to "invent the university" and its language in their minds and in practice. A case study is worth a moment's scrutiny because while it focuses on an individual Ph. D. student, it has universal implications.

Carol Berkenkotter, Thomas Huckin and John Ackerman (1988) studied a Carnegie Mellon University student during his first year in graduate school as he struggled to “become literate in” the rhetorical research community (10). At first, he clung to a familiar vocabulary in which he was secure as a writer; he resisted adopting the new conventions partly because they were unfamiliar and partly because he had not yet grasped the concepts behind the words. By reading, thinking, talking about and experimenting with the new vocabulary, he gradually entered the new community and gained confidence in operating within its conventions. These researchers’ findings demonstrate that novices endure this process not only because they want to learn subject matter but also to join the conversation of the community which surrounds them (40). When I hear college freshman saying “In high school, we never revised . . . ” or “I’ve always done a bibliography not a Works Cited list . . . ” I know these are symptoms of the struggle to cope with new rules, and paradoxically, new freedoms. John Ackerman suggests that the high school-to-college transition can be—and indeed must be—facilitated by composition instructors who show that “fluency with certain rhetorical and linguistic commonplaces . . . comes with practice” and who “. . . teach [these conventions] directly to make students aware of the expectations of [a] new language community” (175-6).

Marilyn Cooper (1989) recognizes the “ideal” discourse community as “. . . particular situations in which people come together in discourse and negotiate what they want to do and what matters to them. It is a community in the sense that it is concerned about each of its members, their goals, their needs, and what they have to offer” (204). But she nevertheless questions whether colleges impose standards which fail to recognize or validate the student’s abilities to use lan-



guage in other contexts—on the job or in a fraternity meeting, for example. Cooper also stresses the notion that discourse communities are “continually in flux” rather than fixed entities; that is, their standards change as does their membership. If a group begins to see itself as a “social structure that exists separately from the individuals who are its members,” Cooper believes that discourse communities can then be used as political tools especially if those who envision themselves as “insiders” look at others as “outsiders.” (204). The danger for academic discourse communities is to become these fixed societies, labeling the academy’s language “correct” and by implication language outside the academy “incorrect.” She is wary of proponents of composition studies elevating any discourse community, and its norms, to a status which excludes or sets rules for “the type of discourse that will be—and will not be—accepted by the community” (211). Her argument is not that discourse communities in themselves are inherently problematic, but that students may be led to believe that one discourse community’s standards are more valid than another’s.

To avoid the arrogance of imposing academic conventions, researchers (see Bowser [1991], Hare and Fitzsimmons [1990], Kutz [1986], among others) have advocated creating classroom environments where collaborative learning and teaching strategies help students form their own discourse communities. In a classroom, an instructor’s understanding of writing as a social activity may lead to activities (peer review of essays, small group brainstorming) which facilitate students’ acquisition of skills to help them function with competence in the academy. Often, a classroom where collaborative learning strategies are used becomes an environment—a place and an attitude—where students learn to speak and use a common language or academic conventions which they practice.

They've formed a new discourse community of individuals who share a common goal—learning to write—and the desire to find ways to achieve that goal.

Outside a campus framework, Freed and Broadhead (1987) base their examination of discourse communities on Dell Hymes' speech community definition: "a community sharing rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety" (154). Their study of non-academic discourse communities led them to the conclusion that discourse communities "condition and influence not only written products composed within them but the behaviors, attitudes and strategies that ultimately produce those products, which in turn define the communities themselves" (156). As applied to an institution or organization Freed and Broadhead begin to use the term "culture" as a synonym for discourse community; that is, within a group of writers—novice or experienced—a specialized language and norms develop that allows members to communicate (157). Their addition to the definition of a discourse community—the idea of culture—brings with it a sense of history, expectations, local definitions and attitudes.

Lee Odell (1985) watched the way staff members produced written documents in a state agency and concluded that "the process of composing may entail a great deal of social interaction" including "communal brainstorming." He begins to call not only the agency but outside influences on it a "culture which governs what is put on the page" (250).

Lester Faigley (1985), taking what he calls the "social perspective" to writing research, echoes Odell as well as Freed and Broadhead suggesting that "communication is inextricably bound up in the culture of a particular society" (236). In expanding this idea, he says that "specialized kinds of discourse competence"

are acquired in a discourse community. "Members know what is worth communicating, how it can be communicated and what other members of the community are likely to know and believe to be true about certain subjects . . . " (238). He calls for ethnographic research into non-academic discourse communities to "examine how a particular discourse community is organized by its interactions and by the text it produces" (241).

The study of a newsroom brings all these definitions into clearer focus, and emphasizes the aspects of a discourse community which enable it to accomplish tasks such as revision. Its members not only share language and goals, but they embody a culture. Before delving into the details of that culture, we must consider whether discourse communities are simply collections of people joined by family, cultural or social ties. Or, as the research examined here suggests, do the communication and the rules that govern it come out of complex relationships based on shared purposes?

### **How does a discourse community form?**

A group of individuals who use the same language is not necessarily a discourse community. For example, the audience at a play can be presumed to share the same language as the actors. But the auditorium full of people is not a discourse community. They are audience and actors assembled for one performance to enjoy language and to produce meaning. As a member of the audience in seat B-3, my comprehension of the language and construction of the meaning may be entirely different from that of the person in B-4. There is no opportunity for discourse—conversation, memos, essays—that would shape that meaning so that it is shared and/or intensified. And it is unlikely that this audience will ever

assemble again. It cannot develop the vocabulary or the conventions to produce deeper understanding that would occur could it meet over a period of time.

As Bizzell makes clear in her definition, a discourse community is a group drawn together through language use, and which gradually defines its own rules or conventions which enable it to achieve mutual goals through its communication. In a writing classroom, a discourse community forms when an instructor fosters its formation. Communication based on a shared syllabus and textbook is inevitable; Ackerman (1990) calls this an “ad hoc discourse communit[y] . . . with routines, codes, conventions and ethos defined momentarily by the actions of the class” (180). But the sense of a shared purpose as a community of writers must grow over the weeks and months the class spends together. Their conversations will turn from “what does this essay say?” to “what does this writer do to help (or hinder) the reader’s understanding?” To talk about *writing as writing* rather than *meaning* requires a new vocabulary. While groping for words to discuss writing, students begin to formulate new ideas about how writers work—and in the process, form a community with a shared goal—to understand the writer’s task.

The classroom discourse community is the tangible, visible and local manifestation of what exists as a larger environment: the college community as a whole, and as disciplinary academic communities within it. Students are tacitly members of these larger communities, but their abilities to apply the conventions each demands must develop over time. Academic discourse communities form and reform; each has a history and culture, a tradition and expectations; but each is reformed by the presence of new students and new communication needs.

In analyzing the way a non-academic discourse community forms, Odell

considered social psychologist Karl Weick's theories about "the important role that people play in creating the environments that surround them" not only in a physical and social sense, but in the way that beliefs and values are a foundation for discourse conventions (270). Odell called for further examination of the way members identify and communicate such values to newcomers by asking among other things "What are the formal means of instruction? What are the informal means? What would happen if a writer were to test those limits [imposed by the conventions]?" (271).

Composition teacher and part-time newspaper writing coach Carolyn Matalene (1989) observes "In many professional contexts . . . 'the writer' is not one person but a group. And when writers work together, the act of writing often serves important functions for the group well beyond that of producing a text . . . " (vi). Those functions may include discussions that help the writers arrive at consensus about the focus, the style, the audience and other rhetorical concerns.

A newspaper's writers and editors share a language which enables them to discuss their work. As a discourse community, they develop and use specialized meanings for words such as "deadline," "lead" and "feature." The use of this specialized vocabulary does not go outside the newsroom. It allows the discourse community to function efficiently because words such as "feature" become codes—cues, in Flower's theory—to trigger cognitive action. The writer hearing the message "write a human interest feature on Jack Smith" goes immediately to work. He or she decodes the words "human interest feature" into a list of steps to achieve this goal; that is, a paradigm is visualized because the writer knows how a "feature" differs from "spot news." But when writing, news writ-

ers and editors adhere to industry and standard written English conventions because their work is read by a general audience. Matalene believes it is essential that discourse communities who communicate with others outside their sphere understand that they must still abide by “conventions of discourse common to all readers” (vi).

The newspaper discourse community is long-standing; it has developed over generations as an industry which uses written language in a distinctive way. Its membership may change, but its legacy (style books, editors training their successors and training writers) enables it to deepen and use specialized meanings. Or as Matalene puts it “a newspaper . . . both creates journalists and is created by them” (266).

Discourse communities form because they have a purpose to fulfill through communication. In the classroom, it is to facilitate writing growth and confidence; in the newspaper, it is to facilitate writing under the pressure of time.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE NEWSROOM AS DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

A newspaper newsroom resembles any other discourse community as a group of people who use the same language in the same way and who share a purpose for that language use. But these specific characteristics make it a unique discourse community:

- It employs specialized vocabularies unrecognized outside the newsroom
- It constantly measures and defines what news is
- It has the shared purpose of writing, news gathering, news reporting for its audience of readers
- Its members are familiar with the news-writing task and each other's writing and editing strengths, background, experience
- The newsroom operates on a clearly defined process which becomes part of a reporter's mental framework
- The community's decision makers are active in the process
- Editors and reporters are open to negotiating
- Reporters are receptive to and anticipate response to their writing; they expect to respond to the same basic questions when writing and rewriting their work
- The community relies on cooperation to publish a newspaper
- The community comprises paid professional (i.e. well-educated, trained and experienced) writers who have chosen this career

These characteristics will be examined not only in this overview, but in following one reporter through his preparation for and writing of one news article (chapter 4). It is important to understand at the outset that the newsroom is both

the work space and the culture of those concerned with writing the news text (or “copy”) which leaves presses for readers’ homes. The newsroom traditionally is one large space with reporters grouped in one area, and editors gathered in another—all within sight of each other. The visual and oral connections are reminders of a common task, but more importantly, make doing the job simpler. For example, an editor with a question can with a glance see whether the reporter is in the office or on the phone. Editors, working in close proximity, check spelling or grammatical concerns with each other; these quick conversations save trips to a dictionary or handbook. In sum, “newsroom” is a term which encompasses the geographic space, the people who work within it, and the culture it represents. More than one study (among them American Society of Newspaper Editors-sponsored survey 1982; Weaver and Wilhoit’s American Journalist comparison of 1971 and 1983 data; sociological analysis of particular aspects of news work) has examined who makes up the newsroom and how the community makes decisions. One of particular note, “Communication Practices of Journalists: Interaction with Public, Other Journalists,” (Burgoon et al 1987), found that 56 percent of the sampled journalists said “my coworkers frequently discuss their stories with me” and 47 percent said “my editor and I frequently discuss the content of various stories,” documenting what any newspaper reader assumes to be a natural occurrence—that conversations about writing occur in a newsroom (127).

The news community (at The Press-Enterprise or any newspaper) shares a deadline-driven work day and basic news vocabulary. In journalism classes, would-be reporters write breaking or hard news (the city council decides to raise utility fees on January 1) and features (how one family will be affected by the



pending increase). On the job in a particular newsroom, they will hone this knowledge. Parsigian (1987) asked reporters how they learned to follow a recognizable planning and writing pattern in developing articles. Most said they learned it through "trial and error . . . imitation (studying the work of other journalists) . . . [or] through a combination of trial and error and imitation . . . " (727).

Large newspapers subdivide their newsroom discourse community into departments: features, sports, business and local news. At The Press-Enterprise Riverside office, three different "newsrooms" are maintained: sports, business and features, and the main newsroom are completely separate; indeed, they are on three different floors of the building. The physical separation of departments from the main newsroom encourages development of departmental discourse communities, but according to Joe Happ, assistant to the president and executive editor at The Press-Enterprise, the separation discourages "spontaneous cross pollination" of ideas. Happ explains: "An entertainment reporter who sees something he thinks is [general] news on the way to work may forget it when he gets to his terminal (desk) and gets lost in a story. But if he walks by the city desk later, he might say 'hey you might want to check out . . .' But that doesn't happen because the departments are not together" (1992). Sharing news tips is only one reason why a newsroom discourse community often shares work space. Additional advantages are obvious: if the environment is one of "momentum and hysteria" as Miami Herald editor Gene Miller believes (qtd. Weaver and Wilhoit 65), the newsroom is also the place which motivates its writers, and forces them to meet deadlines.

Within the larger discourse community at a newspaper, departmental groups

use even more specialized vocabularies. In sports, writers and editors refer to “agate,” a frequent typesetting choice for information, whereas in features, agate is rarely used. (Agate describes a type style capable of condensing large amounts of information such as player statistics into a small space.)

In every newsroom, spoken and written communication keep news copy moving toward deadline: the production-imposed limit to writing and editing activities. Editors’ comments and questions for reporters may be conveyed in a conference, or issued as electronic memos; editors’ written questions are also inserted into the text of an article.

Editors spend a large portion of their time answering questions of news worthiness. The “is it news?” question is posed again and again over the course of a day as breaking news enters the newsroom, but it is also a part of the editors’ own conferences. Front pages of each section are significant; their content signals what editors regard as the most important news in that section. Editors confer, and because there is only one front page to each section, there is obvious competition for placing stories on it. Ann E. Reisner’s 1992 analysis of 64 different news conferences at daily newspapers confirms that the discourse community itself serves an important role in answering the pervasive “is-it-news?” newsroom question. She labels editors’ discussions “sensemaking,” defined as “a complex set of practices” (984) often coded and dependent on a working relationship which develops over time. Reisner found that “editors’ decisions about where to place stories arise in social interaction and are not based on a specified set of objective values formalized outside of the context of those interactions” (986). Sociologist Marilyn Lester (1980) examines a newsroom as a place which generates news worthiness, and suggests that “the rules governing newswork

are not simply given and available, but actually constructed, interpreted, and elaborated upon in the actual settings of newswork" (993). Weaver and Wilhoit (1986), drawing from a survey of working journalists designed to define the tasks and working conditions of a modern news reporter or editor, note that determining newsworthiness "often depends on talking with other journalists" (124) and that "news staff (colleagues) were the most important factor in determining newsworthiness " (126). In other words, while everyone within the newsroom discourse community has a fundamental sense of what news is and how it is communicated to readers, the primary work of the community is to apply that knowledge to each story as it appears. The discourse community is the environment in which answers to the what-is-news question are tested and clarified.

In the larger newspaper community, some editors and media critics are questioning the traditional definition of news—or even if there is "a definition" by which to measure stories. Susan Miller, vice president/news of Scripps Howard Newspapers is one of them. "I was taught that 'news' has four elements: proximity, prominence, unusualness and human interest. It was assumed people like to read about events nearby, famous people and anything bizarre or amusing" (170). Now Miller says "'News' can just as validly be defined as activities and events that affect large numbers of people such as traffic, weather and what kids are learning in school. The number of people affected by a topic is just as proper a measure of newsworthiness as 'unusualness' is" (171). Certainly whatever the industry would adopt as a definition of news has evolved through the work of generations of journalists and editors. This provides a foundation for each newsroom, but as a discourse community, each newsroom is faced with constant re-evaluation and re-definition of that foundation.

Reporters and editors share a common purpose—to provide for readers the news of the day as they have discovered it. To this end, this discourse community's definition must be extended to include the reader, an invisible member of the newsroom. Editors hold the reader's understanding as the measure of an article's clarity. "Will the reader understand?" is a question often posed when an article is written, read, edited and revised. It is a byword for gauging not only the effect of the writing as a whole, but the use of terms and the design of sentences within articles. At the Press-Enterprise editors demand clear, direct writing, not only to assure the reader's understanding, but to maintain a day-to-day quality which writers must achieve and which readers can expect. "Clear and direct writing" in this discourse community describes active, lively prose which avoids use of jargon and generalities. For example, Press-Enterprise Metro editor Elaine Regus says she often reads for "educationese" which slips into sentences and may cover up a reporter's lack of understanding of a term or concept. "They must understand [the term] to present it to readers," she explains (1992). With her colleagues at the Metro desk, she asks reporters to clarify what the issues are and what the reader's relationship to them is.

The list of editors' questions is extensive, and questions are a routine form of communication within the newsroom discourse community. As we have seen, "Is it news?" is repeatedly raised as a way of defining the newspaper's content, a question applied by editors when evaluating assignments, and by reporters when finding material, interviewing, and writing articles. A pair of corollary questions "Will the reader care?" and "Can the reader understand?" follow. Other questions are more practical: "How long do you think the article will be?" or "Can you write twenty inches?" Editors demand "Where's the lead?" when

reading an article which violates the first law of journalistic writing. The lead (the article's earliest paragraphs) answers for the reader the who, what, when, where and why of the topic as quickly as possible.

As is apparent to any newspaper reader putting yesterday's paper on the recycling stack, answers to who, what, when, why and where change daily. A newspaper is about what's new. Matalene asserts that "valuing new and surprising information . . . contrasts importantly with the usual procedures of academic discourse" (267). Whereas a student assigned an essay on spider images in Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson will check library reference works, find articles and bibliographies, take notes, organize and analyze the information (old, established data) and put it together with his/her thoughts (new information), a newspaper writer *begins* with the new information. He or she may research facts, reread previous articles, but the essential nature of and reason for the new article is to present new information. This is one of the ways "local knowledge," to use Michael Carter's term, is important in a newsroom. A writer may enter with general academic writing skills, but converting to valuing "new" over "old" information demands the assistance of the discourse community. Additionally, the reporter learns that quoting research others have published and using footnotes to document their work is replaced by doing his/her own research. The reporter asks authorities who are local or can be reached by phone for current information. Making this transition from academic to journalistic writing is not difficult; reporters are not only trained stylistically to move from their former discourse communities' conventions to those of the newsroom, but having read newspapers, they've recognized many of the differences for themselves.

One of the most salient features of a discourse community is the way its members internalize its expectations, questions and genres, so that in time, the discourse community is both external and internal. Or as Ackerman phrases it, "context is stored in the form of schemata . . . that . . . provide procedures for acting in accordance with cultural and contextual expectations" (176). The schemata or internalized patterns, function as a specific and daily framework to encourage meeting deadlines and producing copy, but these patterns also become mental prompts for editors and writers when making decisions during fast-paced work days.

All of the characteristics which define this particular discourse community explain not only how it functions, but how it encourages revision. Among them, the clearly defined process, editors and reporters accustomed to and open to negotiation, an anticipated response to and questioning of written work are especially important to a climate where reporters accept not only the work of revision, but the need for it. Each of these characteristics will be examined in relation to revision, and specifically, as they are manifested in The Press-Enterprise newsroom.

### How one newsroom functions

The Press-Enterprise editors are involved in the writing process from beginning to end. They are managers and teachers, coaches and mentors.

They foster the "shared purpose" of the newsroom's activities. Editors<sup>1</sup> occupy a

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial labels at the Press-Enterprise are numerous. An executive editor and one assistant are at the top; managing editors next divide newsroom operations, supervising specialized editors such as Metro (short for metropolitan and taking the place of old city editors), copy, entertainment, sports, food, business, Sunday and editorial page.



hierarchy: those at the top have less contact with newscopy itself and increasing contact with personnel and readers. They staff the paper and answer reader complaints; they formulate policy and see that it is implemented; they are charged with long-range planning, budgeting and are responsible for the over-all news philosophy of the newspaper. Editors below them, each managing a particular department or category of news (sports, features, local or county news), assign articles and do "first reads" of the resulting work. It is their questioning and probing, their demands regarding clarity, which most influence the writer's revision. Copy editors review reams of news text on a daily basis, and in the interest of cohesiveness, engage in minor editing of sentences and paragraphs; if major changes are required, and there is time, the article goes back to the writer accompanied by questions and comments. Eventually, those editors charged with making up pages, add headlines, subheads and captions to complete an article.

Many editors have been reporters and therefore not only understand the barriers reporters encounter—interviewees who refuse to talk or information that is classified—but also the process of gathering and organizing the information in written form. All speak the same language—one of deadlines (the time when the all news copy must go to the next step of production), leads (initial paragraphs focusing on the primary facts of the event or issue), takes (length), layouts (the way the elements on a newspaper page are displayed), headlines and nutgraphs (part of the lead). Having been in the reporter's chair, however, does not mean editors are satisfied with bad writing. Weaver and Wilhoit show that editors' most frequent complaints about their staffs involved writing: "About a fifth of the problems cited were described as writing difficulties with organiza-

tion, clarity, repetition or awkwardness. "A fourth of the writing weaknesses fell under grammar, syntax and spelling errors, but "reporting problems rarely were mentioned" (80). Their dissatisfaction combined with the pressure of deadlines may produce questions that put a writer on the defensive. Special sections editor Tom McCann, a 40-year veteran of journalism, says "we want the reporter to see it's the work, not them personally. Editing [today] is more open, more of a dialogue, a partnership. We're working together on information so that we can present it to a third party—the audience."

This is one way the newsroom-as-discourse-community is perpetuated. Its culture is handed down to novices in a trial-by-fire apprenticeship. As the reporter moves through various "beats" (specific assignments such as courts, schools or local government) and becomes increasingly aware of the newsroom's history, vocabulary and expectations, he or she becomes more valuable to the community.

David Broder, a long-time writer for *The Washington Post*, points to another way the newsroom's culture is important: fostering a sense of values and reporting standards in those who are just entering the profession. In 1980, a stunning revelation of reporting fraud (a reporter won a Pulitzer Prize for a story which was based on a fictional source) compelled soul-searching at many newspapers. Broder asked himself and his editor "whether older reporters, like myself, had failed to pass on to our younger colleagues the same code of professional behavior and reportorial responsibilities that had been drilled into our heads when we came into our first newsrooms" (312). At subsequent informal sessions with those young reporters, Broder discovered that "younger reporters were as fully committed to the disciplines of our craft as I could hope" (313). But his probing



made clear one of the most vital roles of this discourse community: communicating its standards and values.

### Who establishes standards

Bruce Garrison (1990) defines journalism style as more than the reporter's voice, but the voice of the medium itself. "These are the rules of presentation journalists use in communicating with readers . . . . Style brings uniformity and clarity to news writing . . . . Some style rules have evolved over generations of writers and remain for no better reason than tradition or practicality . . . . Other rules exist because they are necessary for clarity in meaning and are not easily or arbitrarily changed" (163). In this sense, style can be equated with conventions.

At The Press-Enterprise, as in many newspapers, style books form the basic standard for writing. The Press-Enterprise uses the Associated Press Stylebook augmented by its own local requirements. These include a reporter's policy manual (officially titled News Department Handbook Supplement) and a style file which has been developed over the years, but which editors admit is out of date. That means that many standards are communicated as needed in the ongoing education of reporters. Executive editor Joe Happ says that copy editors and metro editors convey the standards to reporters in the context of a specific story. This includes idiosyncratic local spellings or which communities rate a dateline on a story. Policies that affect reporting standards (rather than the mechanics of writing) are formally spelled out in the newsroom's own handbook. These include procedures for handling reader complaints about a published story or whether a reporter may accept a meal from an organization whose meeting he or she is covering ("staff members should offer to pay for food

and refreshments but not for additional charges that go directly to support the groups"). Whether formalized or not, editors make the final decisions about what is and is not included in local standards and policies, and also enforce these rules.

One Press-Enterprise policy demonstrates the way the larger community influences writing standards and overall newsroom values. In Press-Enterprise news stories, no vulgar or obscene language may be used unless there is a compelling reason to do so, and a managing editor will decide the validity of that "compelling reason." In this case the decision is taken out of the hands of those who routinely make judgments about news and news copy. This, Happ explains, is a reflection of the community in which the newspaper publishes: "Riverside County is fairly conservative" (1993).

Reporters and editors hired by The Press-Enterprise possess college degrees and journalistic experience. They enter the newsroom's discourse community having already internalized many of the conventions which they will continue to apply to their writing at The Press-Enterprise. But as in the case with students leaving an English class to write for a psychology class, some conventions continue in effect, while new ones must be adopted.

Writers arrive at a newspaper with different levels of ability, and while learning local conventions must unlearn former conventions. At The Wall Street Journal, for example, second and subsequent references to an individual carry Mr., Mrs., Dr., or similar appropriate titles with the surname. At The Press-Enterprise, the convention is to use last name only on second reference to the person, omitting a title. (There are exceptions at both newspapers; The Wall Street Journal drops "honorifics" for convicted felons, and the Press-Enterprise

adds them in obituaries.) The sorting process—adding new information and discarding what is no longer valuable—is facilitated by other reporters, editors and the newspaper's culture. But it is life within the discourse community itself which refines this knowledge, making it a part of the reporter. And it is this conformity to the conventions of the community which enables the newspaper to operate. At the Press-Enterprise, Joe Happ believes that the "learning and un-learning" of standards and policies is a continuous one. "The day-by-day editing process imparts knowledge of standards [to reporters]," Happ explains, adding that in many cases, "editors prefer head-to-head editing with the reporter. Training happens every day" (1993). The newspaper provides formal orientation to news reporters which includes a meeting with managing and executive editors and a conference in which the policies in the handbook are covered verbally. New editors and reporters are also taken on a day-long tour of the county, and when the reporter being replaced is still on the job, he or she works with the newcomer to provide information about sources and other mechanics of doing the job.

### **The Metro Desk: the editors' discourse community**

At the Press-Enterprise, the "metro desk" is the hub of the main newsroom, and within the other news departments (sports, features), a copy desk serves this role. Metro editors are specialists who have divided the workload geographically and by subject. One metro editor has an overall view and is also deputy managing editor. He keeps general assignment reporters busy. Breaking, big news such as an earthquake which demands a massive reporting effort, forces him to negotiate with other editors to borrow staff. In addition to the four metro

editors in Riverside, there are two in county offices supervising the work of significantly sized reporting staffs. Metro editors make assignments and discuss issues with reporters. They communicate one-to-one if the reporter is in the same office; if not, they use the phone, FAX and computer system to keep in constant touch.

Editors live by lists, and the primary tool by which they organize their staff's days and their own is the "budget," a list of stories by topic and synopsis which is updated three to four times during the day. "Daybreak" in a morning circulation newspaper is 11 a.m. (deadline is midnight or thereabout). By mid-afternoon, editors are receiving and reading articles. The assignment editor does the "first read," and then the questioning and conferring process with reporters begins.

Editors talk to each other both in meetings, and over their terminals as they read and edit copy. Their debate is, of course, frequently about whether an issue is news—or if it has a local angle. The wire editor<sup>2</sup>, for example, may read an item which he or she believes has local implications, and send it with questions to a metro editor who then confers with his/her counterparts. Eventually, a decision is made; often local additions are made to the wire story, and frequently, the wire story prompts a complete second story with a local point of view.

Editors talk about what stories from the budget are to be used in the various zoned editions. Coordination of the copy flow is vital not only to meeting production deadlines, but in order to avoid duplication. For that reason, editors'

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<sup>2</sup> Wire Editor: An anachronistic term dating to national and international news services' previous transmission of copy by telephone wire to newsroom teletypes. Now all such copy arrives via modem, and is viewed on newsroom terminal screens.

decisions are not only verbalized, but each article carries a list documenting its origin and subsequent stops in the editing process. For example, if the metro editor responsible for the Corona-Norco edition uses an article on beekeeping, the Hemet metro editor who reviews it for possible use, can see where it is being used. And because of the volume of news copy that one editor may review in a day, the list he/she uses to track stories in his/her own section is augmented by the list on individual stories. A careful editor will not run the same story two days in a row, or twice in one edition.

Editors' conversations also involve making decisions about "where to play" a story—is it a business story since it's on the economy, or does it have far-reaching effects and go on page one, A section? When an entertainer is involved in an accident, is it an entertainment story or a news story?

Editors discuss information with reporters who stop by or call to "test" an item or idea for newsworthiness. Or reporters query editors about a long-term project they'd like to pursue, or a particular angle they see for a story. Tips, rumors, items of hearsay are checked for validity. An editor may make a few phone calls or talk with colleagues or simply suggest that the reporter follow-up. Newsrooms are filled with talk about whether something alleged to be happening will happen and if it does, what it may mean to readers.

Newsrooms are noisy, and editors and reporters learn to work with one ear tuned to the commotion. It is within the chaotic sound of phones ringing and terminal keyboards clacking that work is done. But because newspapers focus on what is new, the discourse community's background conversation may be a source of information. A voice shouting "the mayor just resigned" forces an editor or reporter to update a story containing the mayor's name.

Just as the newsroom is a source of information, it is also a “sanctuary” according to Marcia McQuern, executive editor and president of The Press-Enterprise. She explains: “A reporter may say ‘he’s a jerk’ when referring to a source because their questions haven’t been answered or the person won’t return calls. But that’s not for publication; they have to be able to ‘vent’ in an environment where others understand their frustration and accept it as part of the job” (1992). The newsroom is also a sanctuary because stories are incubating; some ideas are pursued for weeks before they can be published—if at all. If a hunch, a lead, does not prove to be true or newsworthy, no matter how much time has been devoted to it, it will not run. Editors/reporters need freedom to test ideas, work on stories without eavesdroppers.

Headline writing is one of the final tasks an editor faces. The headline not only “titles” a story, but specifically previews its content. One Press-Enterprise metro editor, Darrell Santschi, points out that television’s instant news coverage has changed the style of newspaper headlines. Breaking news no longer shouts from the front page in headlines such as: “Kennedy shot” or “Iraq invades Kuwait.” Santschi says the style change reflects readers’ awareness of events: by the time the reader picks up the paper, he/she has witnessed the general’s press conference or the president’s announcement on TV; newspaper headlines have been transformed into “here’s the full story” announcements (1992).

The newsroom is unique as a discourse community, and professional membership in it demands the ability to create a new product every day. The newsroom starts over from scratch because “news happens” and that news dictates the content of the paper. The skills needed to gather and write the news do not change, nor does the process. It is this clearly defined process, where decision-



makers and writers work together, that produces the newspaper on time, day after day. In a classroom, an instructor and students may work together, and may even collaborate in the revision of drafts. The collaboration may or may not be reflected in the final draft; in the end, the individual student may make decisions that ignore readers' suggestions because it is his or her work alone which is graded. In a newspaper, bylines and paychecks reward writers, but their work is always a merging of ideas, styles and standards which the discourse community has established.

## CHAPTER 3

### EDITING AND REVISION

The spider with whom I shared a shower is still wandering through my mind. As I try to find a place for its journey in an essay, I question my motivation. Is the anecdote attractive for its humor or its out-of-the-ordinary nature? Or is its rhetorical value yet to be discovered? Do I have time to play with it as a metaphor? Can I make a point with it? My questions eventually cause me to put the spider story in the back of my mind for "someday" use. In the writing process, ideas are frequently examined, rejected or put into storage; sometimes writers modify the original idea, and even before it is anything but a fragmentary mental construct, it's been through a revision. Why do I revise my ideas before they land on paper? Why do I revise them after they have been put into readable sentences and paragraphs? Revision is in part a response to a discourse community's expectations: I know the spider will be acceptable in some writing situations and unacceptable in others. The context in which I am communicating sets the criteria.

Questions are posed at intervals in the writing process—at the time the idea is conceived, at the time a first draft is in progress, at the time a draft is read for cohesion, at the time it is perused by another reader, and certainly at the time of revision. A discourse community puts those questions into words. A composition class-as-discourse community asks its questions tentatively as members learn to draft, rewrite, revise and rewrite. Whether asked tentatively or confidently, the questions lead to revision.

As we have seen, the newsroom discourse community asks questions routinely. It works within a clearly defined process: editors make assignments,

reporters do the legwork and writing, editors edit copy, reporters rewrite, editors re-edit copy and revise. The difference between the composition classroom and the newsroom is that editing and revision are in a different sequence. Both discourse communities value rewriting; but in a classroom, the discourse community learns through rewriting. When engaged in revision—or discussing a draft as the first step in revision—the student writers and readers learn more about writing. In a newsroom, the discourse community demands that standards of clarity and accuracy, length and genre be met in rewriting. The purpose of the professional's activity is to present copy that meets those standards; the reporter may or may not learn more about writing in the process. While a student may have similar motivations to finish the assignment and meet an instructor's standards, rewriting may be a new way to achieve those goals. He or she will therefore learn not only how to write within given conventions, but more about writing itself.

In a writing class, students are taught that revision is “re-seeing” and rethinking, amplifying and expanding, clarifying and developing concepts. Revision is the heart of the writing process; it is where the most intense thinking and writing occurs. Donald Murray (1978) views revision as part of the writer's discovery of meaning, and is “not concerned with correctness in any exterior sense” (92). Editing follows. Indeed, editing and proofreading are often linked as the last tasks a writer must perform before handing over a draft for grading or publication (see St. Martin's Guide to Writing, The Norton Guide to Writing, Barnet & Stubbs's Practical Guide to Writing, among other standard college composition texts). Editing in this sense is viewed as a mechanical tidying of a manuscript. Looking for misplaced commas or modifiers, scouting for fragments or run-on

sentences, repairing misspelled or misused words come after creative activity.

At a newspaper, editing encompasses revision. It is a copy editor's job not only to replace commas with semi-colons where appropriate, but to question each fact, each statement, each name for accuracy and clarity. Matalene observes that "copy editors . . . are surely the most conscientious wordsmiths in our culture: their knowledge of the conventions of the print code and their understanding of syntax is extraordinary" (277). An assignment editor (as distinct from his/her copy editing role) reads for deep conflicts in the text: does it make sense? Is the writer communicating with a reader? Does paragraph two follow paragraph one and lead to paragraph three? Is there a lead? Are transitions clear sign-posts? Are there terms that will confuse a reader? Above all, the editor first reading a story will ask "why are we doing this? What is the reason for the story?" (Opotowsky, 1993).

The editor is also reading for uniformity of style. Front page and other hard news (as contrasted with features) demands a straightforward presentation of information: no opinion, no extraneous details, no cute plays on words permitted. Most often, the inverted pyramid is employed, what has been called "the most space-efficient story form known" (Brooks 49). The inverted pyramid—putting the most important information first—reflects newsroom emphasis on what is new. Tom McCann, senior special sections editor at the Press-Enterprise, a former city editor, says "Journalism as a discipline is repetitive, formulaic; you try to get a young reporter thinking along with the formula, make them structure things as directly as possible . . . [At a newspaper] clarity is the biggest thing" (1992).

If an editor finds murky sentences or paragraphs, holes in the information,

too much jargon and not enough “plain English,” the story—if time permits—goes back to the writer with questions designed to guide revision. In this reshaping, writer and editor collaborate, but the writer’s authorship is retained; when the writer is unavailable or the deadline is imminent, editors revise, but leave their questions for writers to review the next day. (At the Press-Enterprise the writer’s original story is preserved even when the published version differs from the version he/she submitted. [For an example, see Appendix C.] An electronic typesetting system allows editors to highlight sentences, words, phrases or entire paragraphs in what is called “notes mode,” or a format which will not appear in type. On the screen, the information is still visible; in type, it is not. By using notes mode, an editor can ask questions and make comments to prompt revision. Elaine Regus, one of the Press-Enterprise metro editors, says the notes are meant as “constructive criticism, and the purpose is to teach the writer how to make ideas clearer or to reorganize a story to provide the most important information ‘up front’” [1992]).

David Broder writes of the tension in the relationship between writers and editors: “Editors are friends and adversaries. They have their own ideas of what makes a good story and try to influence which stories a reporter pursues” (312). And the two often have different points of view regarding a story’s effectiveness once written. A newspaper writer invests time—and self—in writing, and when the story goes to the editor, is fairly confident that it meets the assignment. An editor reads with a different perspective: he or she reads not only as a news professional with expectations for the story, but also as a surrogate newspaper reader. The editor’s definition of completeness may differ from the reporter’s. The editor wants a readable, clean story (no grammatical or syntax errors), an



accurate and cohesive relating of facts, and information that's properly attributed. Once these standards are met, the story is complete. Editors are not shy about pointing to a writer's failures. In a composition classroom, a student writer's peer group may couch their criticism in statements like "Do you think it might work better if you changed a word or two?" or "I'm not sure I like the introduction, but it's your paper," comments designed to preserve the writer's ego. The newspaper writer may be just as sensitive to criticism, but he or she quickly learns that deadlines truncate conversations. Rather than wheedling the writer to make another attempt at clarifying a point, the editor will bluntly say, "you need another lead" or "take out this sentence and give me another one that makes sense."

McCann says often the editor must take time with a reporter to talk about problems in the story. The conversation, McCann says, is preferable to written questions because "there may be something I don't know; something not clear in the text. I find out more about the situation in discussion with the writer." And while writers and editors work with at least two constraints—their work is called for in a matter of hours and it must be the required length—their goal is always to present readable prose to the public.

Marcia McQuern, president and executive editor of the Press-Enterprise says she believes that newsroom computerization (which occurred at the Press-Enterprise 20 years ago), "has loosened writers up. They can write and write and try out phrases without having to worry about retyping" (1993). Marcia, whose career at the newspaper began as a reporter, remembers having "to type everything with three carbons" before submitting a story for editing. Most of the reporters on the staff now, however, do not recall the days of manual typewriters



and the shuffling of pages via “copy boys” between metro desk and reporter. Pre-computer, stories were revised by cutting and pasting, crossing out and (because copy was triple spaced) inserting new copy between the lines. Editors added new punctuation or phrases in handwriting. The final version went to a typesetter who read and deciphered the copy, setting it in columns of type from which a printed “proof” could be made. The original and the type-set proof went first to a proofreader who marked errors. The typesetter made corrections, printed a second proof, returning it with the original to the editor for comparison and further editing.

In this mechanical process, proofreaders had to be good spellers and grammarians as well as sharp-eyed readers. Now reporters subject their copy to an electronic “spell check” before sending it to an editor. Editors have replaced proofreaders as the second line of defense against misspelled words.

Computers have freed both reporter and editor to revise copy as often as time allows. By eliminating mechanical steps and paper, changes can be made without having to retrace the process from writer to editor to typesetter to proofreader to typesetter to editor and back again.

Howard Kurtz, media reporter at The Washington Post, believes that “Newspapers in the 90s are better written and better edited than at any time in history” (8). Still, Kurtz is critical of the way editing is accomplished. He compares editing styles of yesterday and today in this way:

Once, not too many years ago, editors edited from the gut. They had an instinctive sense of what people might find important or interesting or titillating. Today’s editors have become focus-

group groupies, assembling ordinary folks behind one-way mirrors to find out what is wrong with the product. The very notion that newspapers must study their readers' habits, as if they were some exotic species, is a stunning sign of desperation, of the missing synapse that once provided the spark for daily journalism (339).

Editors in the past were less likely than they are today to work in collaboration with staff writers. An identifiable style, such as that of *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*, was imposed on all copy. Newspapers still value a distinctive voice, but there is a less dictatorial attitude on many copy desks now than in the past.

Whether reader focus groups are indeed shaping the news as Kurtz charges, Matalene doubts that what a reader wants and needs can be understood by an editor, however much he or she professes that editing and writing is done for a reader. Based on her experience as a writing teacher/coach in a newsroom, Matalene questions the reader editors visualize, asserting that "editors in practice . . . do not always have the time to get the story right for readers, and more importantly, they do not really read like readers. They cannot; they have been processing news for too long" (269). To a degree, Matalene sees the newsroom discourse community as one step removed from its readers, rather than including its readers. For while writers and editors may claim "we are writing for a reader," the newsroom experience has shaped not only their knowledge of an article's structure (looking for the lead, its support, the cohesiveness of the information), but the discourse community has shaped the editor's concept of news.

Nevertheless, motivated by an authentic reader or a fictional one, revision is a way of life for writers and editors in a newsroom. Rewriting is expected. The

goal may be to condense information to meet space requirements, or to separate from the main article background information which may be more effective in a "sidebar" or secondary article. It may be to define terms, clarify muddy or inadequately reported information, or to resurrect a lead from the depths of the article. Whatever the objective, rewriting is routine. To demonstrate, chapter 4 follows one story from conference to publication in the Press-Enterprise.

## CHAPTER 4

### ONE STORY START TO FINISH

How does a reporter function within the newsroom discourse community? The reporter has two roles: first, to gather information, analyze and interpret it as news, and second, to write the news in language a reader can understand. In neither role, however, is the reporter an independent agent. Weaver and Wilhoit's 1983 study reports that two-thirds of the sampled journalists said they had "freedom to determine news story emphasis," (163) and a "large majority [felt] they [had] the ability to get important stories reported" (165). Even with these degrees of autonomy, the reporter is guided by a strict set of standards established by the larger discourse community—the newspaper industry, as well as the local discourse community whose members include other reporters and a bevy of editors to whom the reporter is responsible. To understand how the reporter applies those standards, I followed one reporter for eight hours as he considered, conferred, studied, observed, and translated the decisions of a public commission into two very short articles.

Ernest Pund is a five-year veteran of the Press-Enterprise with a college degree in renaissance literature, and previous experience in weekly newspapers. He's a "general assignment " reporter whose "mini beat" is transportation. Most of the time, his reporting agenda is set by assistant metro editor Christie Hall.

On July 14, 1993, Ernest attended a meeting of the Riverside County Transportation Commission. A large packet of information gave him background on the agenda—a five-page document containing dozens of items, only one of which held mystery: "public comment." Having attended this commission's meetings for two years, Ernest was familiar with the issues, and could predict the

meeting's outcome with some degree of accuracy. With Christie, he discussed its relative importance; and days before, they decided that unless an unexpected development changed the picture, an "action box" summarizing major items would be sufficient. That meant a grouping of short items under the general heading "Transportation Commission" would be the only newspaper record of the meeting.

To prepare for the 2 p.m. meeting Ernest arrived at his desk at 9 a.m. July 14. He called it "homework," explaining that scrutinizing the agenda forces him to "think about" and mentally "cement issues in place." Based on his expectations, and a conference with Christie, he drafted an action box (see appendix A). This served as the framework for his final version. In the draft, he wrote this first item announced by the sub-head: "Vice Chairman Elected:"

The commission unanimously elected ?? ?? to replace Susan Cornelison as vice-chairwoman. Cornelison resigned July 1 and has applied for a paid position with the agency. The commission also decided to accept ?? applications to replace Cornelison as the only public-at-large member of the governing body.

Ernest expected to replace the question marks with names and a number. In fact, this is the way the post-meeting version of the item sent to the Metro desk read:

The commission unanimously named Coachella Valley accountant Russ Beirich to replace Susan Cornelison as the only public-at-large member of the commission.

Cornelison resigned July 1 and has applied for a paid position with the

agency.

Beirich, a partner in the firm of Lund & Guttry, was Cornelison's alternate in the event she was absent. The commission now will accept applications for a new alternate.

Commissioner and Riverside County Supervisor Patricia "Corky"

Larson was elected to replace Susan Cornelison as vice chairwoman of the commission. (See Appendix B for full action box text.)

The item was not published exactly as Ernest revised it. Another Metro editor (Christie had left the building when final editing was done) eliminated the last sentence entirely, and condensed the first two paragraphs into fewer words which said essentially the same thing (see Appendix C).

Ernest's decision to draft the action box was consistent with his experience (two years' observation of the commission; familiarity with issues), his reading of the agenda (knowledge of the way items are phrased and identified), and his conference with Christie (together they decided that this meeting would rate no more than "action box" reporting, but each was open to surprises that might change this decision).

The rough draft also revealed the presence of mental schemata on which he and other reporters call to organize articles. Because newspaper writers work under deadline pressure, they often resort to tried-and-true patterns to present information.

There is another reason to rely on schemata: a reporter is not merely a writer. He/she must corroborate facts, verify name spellings, clarify concepts which are unclear before the article can be said to meet publication standards. This is a time consuming process. For example, confirming a name may mean either a



phone call or a look at previously published articles. Relying on tried-and-true forms shortens the rhetorical invention process, giving the writer more time to take care of more pressing reporting duties.

A reporter, once assigned to a story, does not turn off his or her mind to its demands. The draft was in the computer waiting for revision, but Ernest spent much of his time on the way to, during and after the meeting reviewing the information he had and how (or whether) it fit the label “news.”

On the seven-block, ten-minute drive from the newspaper to the RCTC office, Ernest talked about the individual commissioners, spotlighting the one who had just resigned and then applied for a paid position with the RCTC. He felt (and Christie had agreed) this was a potential conflict of interest and that it could be controversial if her application were discussed during the meeting. (It was, Ernest noted, the first time since her resignation that the commission had met.) Ernest pointed to one other item of potential controversy identified as “surplus land.” To explain, he said the RCTC could either “sell or lease the land, but any action raised the question: should governmental bodies be investing in property to make money?” He had decided it was an item “to watch” for further development.

We squeezed into the back row of a crowded observer section, balancing agenda and notepads on our laps. For my benefit, Ernest identified the members of the commission sitting at the table on either side of the chairman. Also at the table was a man he identified as RCTC’s executive director. Before and during the meeting, Ernest made reference to political relationships and underlying issues, many of which, to a casual observer, were not made obvious in discussion, but which shaped it and on-going deliberations. For example, the executive

director's ego, Ernest said, is apt to be easily bruised. Therefore, certain commissioners tread lightly on topics which might provoke a defensive outburst from him.

For example, the agenda included a director-created proposal to move the RCTC's offices to a new building, but Ernest pointed out, the group's own budget committee had recommended against it. To avoid a confrontation, the commissioners heard an explanation of city approval and financing requirements. The RCTC focus moved from the director and committee's opposition to another set of problems; the commissioners voted to shelve the matter. That prompted Ernest's own deliberations: "Will I trim the item on this [in the action box draft] to half its size? Edit?"

Ernest described the political clout of the commission itself in monetary terms: its primary responsibility is to distribute funds from Measure A, a half-cent sales tax approved by Riverside County voters in 1988. Over the 20-year life of this measure, an estimated \$1 to \$1.2 billion may be collected. The RCTC's decisions affect thousands of people who use Riverside County's highways and public transit systems, and the network of agencies responsible for maintaining and operating those systems.

Ernest's whispered commentary continued through the meeting. Some of it was his attempt to fill gaps in my understanding of the commission and its function. In addition, he tried to expose the workings of his mind for me. To that end much of what he said was his "out-loud thinking" as he debated with himself the increasing or decreasing news value of a specific item. A good example is the commission's vote to shelve the surplus land decision, an item Ernest had labeled as potentially controversial. Once it was set aside, he said: "Do I write

that they shelved it? That's not news. The reader would say what's the point?"

The commission slowly waded through its agenda. Ernest compared their deliberative style to their Orange County counterparts, who he said, "go bang, bang, bang through their agenda; this group talks about everything." The meeting, reaching into the evening, underscored his observation: even for routine items, the RCTC listens and discusses; it hears public comment, staff reports and then considers alternatives. A few decisions are made: they will fund additional bus service in a section of the county, and they approve a long list of "consent items" without discussion.

One other item, a delay in construction to improve Highway 86, provoked Ernest's comment. For years, the notorious state route in the Coachella Valley with its disproportionate number of fatal accidents has been the subject of Press-Enterprise reporting and public outcry. Funds to make the highway less hazardous were approved by the RCTC four years ago, but a snarl of paperwork and a complex approval process delayed actual construction, and on July 14, the commission was told, it will be stalled for perhaps another year by the federal government's insistence that environmental impact reports be resubmitted.

One commissioner's frustration was audible: "Government has become irrelevant; the process is more important than human life." Even so, together with her colleagues, she voted to do whatever is required to get the work underway.

Ernest says: "The Highway 86 decision is important. I'll throw it to the editor, but they [the Metro desk] may say that because of limitation on desert coverage, put it in the box; write it short." (At one time, The Press-Enterprise had three offices in the Palm Springs-Indio area; in 1993 two were closed, and desert

coverage reduced to a minimum.)

The commission moved on to other items, eventually stopping to discuss the site of a commuter rail station to be built in the future. Of two possible sites, one has been the subject of a public hearing at which loud protest came from the proposed station's neighbors. Alex Clifford, a Riverside city councilman who attended the public hearing, and in whose city the site is located, said "they don't want the station." The newly elected vice chair asked "why go for a station [located] where there is public opposition, especially if alternate sites are available?" One of the RCTC staff providing background to the commissioners turned directly to Ernest saying "the press is here; maybe they'll help us get the message out."

When I asked Ernest if the press was directly addressed often in meetings, he said no. Such comments place him in a difficult position because the commission is signaling "this is important," a news judgment that the reporter and/or editor may not share. It also suggests an angle or focus for the coverage: the newspaper views the issue in a broader context than the commission's single focus on its own tasks and goals. Ernest will not say "they asked for help on this" when discussing the issue with Christie, but together they will determine the news value and angle for current and subsequent stories on it.

I asked him about reports filled with jargon—sentences such as the one a staff member uttered to begin her report: "The 110, the 496 and Friday's 1246 meeting; SCAG, MTA and the 1402 committee . . . " He said the jargon or code demanded both his understanding and translation. "Every agency I cover has a different code," he added.

After three and one half hours, the meeting ended at 5:30 p.m. Ernest said

this was a fairly short meeting since many have continued until 7 or 8 o'clock. A closed session followed the public meeting. When he asked what was on the agenda, Ernest was told, but nothing the commission mentioned set off immediate signals he felt obligated to investigate.

He spent the next half hour or so asking questions about issues raised during the meeting. He found the local Caltrans director, and asked for clarification of the predicted delays in current projects which had been outlined for the commission. Ernest's purpose was to answer the question "is this news?" He probed the meaning of several terms and a judge's decision which had led to a change in Caltrans operations; he also looked at a chart with the Caltrans director who interpreted its meaning by explaining what he believed lay ahead. One bit of information helped Ernest decide not to present this as an urgent matter, but one to be followed up later: Caltrans, the director said, expected the state legislature to pass a bill which would make the judge's decision moot.

Ernest also did some work on his relationship with RCTC sources. One staff member provided statistics showing use of the recently opened commuter rail service between Riverside and LA. Ernest pressed for more detail, and for interpretation: what did this figure mean? Was this a current figure or a projected one? He got answers, and then, when he appeared satisfied, changed the subject asking the man, who was leaving for vacation the next day, where he was going. When "fishing" was the reply, the two held a congenial exchange on the subject. Neither of them crossed the line: Ernest didn't invite his source to go fishing nor did the source invite him. Neither suggested a future excursion. Ernest was maintaining lines of communication with an important source while retaining the necessary distance to remain objective.

On the way back to the newspaper, Ernest commented, "I'm thinking about the Caltrans story. Is there a story regarding the delay when it could not be a delay? If legislation is passed and the contracts they've suspended are back in force, what's the point? The delay of several months could be reduced substantially. There's follow-up; it's a matter of time and news space." He spoke of this as his editors do. Newspapers are continually concerned about efficient allocation of resources. It was nearly 6:30 p.m.; he'd spent eight and one half hours on the story, and faced another couple of hours before he finished writing. (The total time involved was significant: he spent something over ten and one-half hours; adding editors' time, nearly 12 work hours were expended for what appeared in the newspaper as one short action box and one accompanying brief story.)

### Writing and rewriting

The discourse community of which Ernest is a member has an external voice—the questions editors ask, the banter reporters exchange—as well as an internal counterpart. The first voice is audible; I listened to Ernest and Christie confer and negotiate in a newsroom alive with conversations about news, writing, the newspaper business, complaints and gossip. The external discourse community is visible, audible, and its conversation on-going.

Evidence of the internal voice can be found in at least two of Ernest's working habits. The first is his judgment of news. During the RCTC meeting, Ernest questioned various actions, weighing their news value. "Would readers care?" was often the substance of his debate. And while he made this debate audible for my benefit, his line of questioning is built-in, and it allows him to make a



mental list of the items which he'll discuss with his editor after the meeting or event.

On the way back to the newspaper office, I asked him whether he heard an editor's voice in his mind as he considered an issue or a comment's news merit. He replied that he did, but that many of his decisions had become instinctive. I later learned that he was rehearsing what he'd say to Christie as we drove back, confirming that he was replaying their earlier conversations as he judged which items were worth further discussion and which were not. "We're hired for our judgment," he said later, a judgment honed by daily use.

Ernest's second working habit as evidence of the internal voice is the way he "pitches ideas" to his editor. (This is "pitching" in the sense of an advertising agency executive who auditions an idea for a client.) The process is worth examining in detail, as it reveals the discourse community at work:

Once back at the newspaper, Ernest sits down with Christie. It is now 7 p.m., the end of her shift. While Ernest was at the meeting, she'd read a lot of copy, made dozens of instant decisions: she was tired and faced a long drive home. With his notes and the meeting agenda, he begins a conversation which is almost in code; they had discussed most of these issues in advance, so very little needed to be said in some cases, while gaps are filled in others.

He first asks: "How interested are we in Highway 86?"

Christie: "It ran on B-1 today." Her reply indicates that the newspaper is very interested; B-1 is the lead page for local news.

Ernest continues: "There's a delay on environmental concerns. The RCTC has requested signals and CHP monitoring of traffic. Toss into action box?" She agrees.

The significant thing here is that Highway 86 was not in the draft action box; it was new business at the meeting, and because of its news value, will be added to the box.

Ernest goes to his second item, saying that the commission was taking no immediate action on a deal for an office building the director had recommended as the RCTC's new home. Christie says cryptically "In box." He moves on.

The third item is a lengthy explanation of the Caltrans announcement that several Riverside County highway projects would be delayed because a judge ruled in May that Caltrans could no longer hire contractors to do work that Caltrans staff could do. Ernest tells Christie about his discussion with the Caltrans director, who believed pending legislation could make the delays inconsequential. Christie asks "What does it mean?" Ernest says "Local agencies will take up the slack. It could be a stronger story later. Are you interested?" Christie: "I'm nodding off." That signals the end of the discussion—and the end of the item. It will not even appear in the action box, although Ernest will continue to monitor the situation.

The fourth item (county bicycle trails) is sketchy in the draft; now with Christie's approval, it will be given more detail.

The fifth item on Ernest's list is the controversy over where the next commuter rail station will be built. Ernest summarizes by saying, "The Pierce Street station is a problem; they are looking at two other sites. They're [RCTC] firing a shot; it's not a given they'll build it on Pierce." Christie is awake now: "Too many people are hostile to this one; do a story of six to seven inches on it; not long."

That item leads naturally to Ernest's query about an item on public response

to the first commuter rail link—should he add it to the box? “Not tonight,” Christie said; “do a weekend summary kind of thing on ridership.” He briefly describes one more item and asks, “Do you care?” Her reply: “The box is getting too long; forget it.” The commission’s housekeeping—electing a new vice chair and appointing a new commissioner—remains in the box by mutual consent. She asks what the name of the newly assigned short story will be to add it to the budget; he says, “Link15 (sic),” and she says, “six to eight inches; no longer,” and gathers up her things to leave. Her day is over; Ernest still has at least an hour and a half ahead of him. It’s now close to 7:30 p.m.

Their conference is part of the discourse community’s continuing conversation to answer again and again “what is news?” Ernest reveals his judgments and Christie asks questions that not only probe for more detail to help her accept or reject his conclusions, but to examine the strength of his confidence in his judgment. Tone of voice, for example, when presenting an item says “yes I think this definitely is news” or “I’m not sure this is news.” Christie reads all of these signals and in her questions, finds out what she needs to know; her decision is what matters. She trusts Ernest, and their discussion demonstrates that trust. But she is responsible for what goes in the paper.

Ernest has presented each item as a story lead, phrasing it as a summary ready for publication. As a reporter, he is constantly organizing information in hierarchical categories: big news, small news, worth watching or of no consequence. And within each item, he must sort out the priorities: what’s the most important bit of information? That becomes the lead; what’s next in importance? He continues to sort until he reaches the end of the list of facts or new developments.

Ernest has presented only those items which he has decided are news. On only one item was there disagreement: his characterization of the Pierce Street commuter station is of a different magnitude than Christie's. He sees it in the context of one meeting and one discussion; she sees it in the larger context of the Riverside political scene. Ernest sees it as an item of business RCTC is investigating; Christie knows the Pierce Street neighborhood is irate, and with this as background, she regards it as bigger news than Ernest does.

The code they speak helps them conduct business efficiently. "I'm nodding off" is Christie's way of telling Ernest that she's not interested in an item and readers would react in the same way; he understands and does not dispute her opinion since he's ambivalent about this item, too. It could or could not be a big story, but it can be followed up later. Their exchange reveals the nature of decision making within the discourse community: a reporter evaluates the newsworthiness of items as the meeting progresses, doing the preliminary work so that he can summarize all the details for the editor who has only to react. Christie's instincts and experience as an editor equip her to quickly determine whether a story is major or minor and how much space it deserves. She says that her liberal arts education taught her to analyze; her work at a small newspaper taught her to apply her journalistic training. Now her decisions are instantaneous; she makes dozens of decisions each day after discussions with Ernest, other reporters and editors. Of course, theirs is only one relationship within the discourse community; another reporter and another editor might reach different decisions.

The discourse community—both internal and external—has influenced Ernest's work in easily identified ways:

1. The shape of the assignment (must be covered, but because it's not of major importance, a short summary is all that an editor expects);
2. The pre-writing (Ernest's study of the agenda for items to watch is largely defined by his experience both as a reporter and observer of this group);
3. The drafting (the action box is written before the meeting begins);
4. The observation of the meeting (what is or is not news is defined by Ernest's own judgment as well as those of the editor with whom he's conferred);
5. The post-meeting information gathering (talking with sources, getting details and interpretations to increase his—and his editor's understanding);
6. The writing (Christie has accepted most of Ernest's ideas, asked for more on one, less on another);
7. The revision (he will write and rewrite with the editor's directions in mind);
8. The final editing (the Metro desk will reshape Ernest's work to fit news requirements and limitations).

Now it's time for the action box and accompanying story to take shape. Ernest says his biggest concern is finding someone to talk about the Pierce Street station. It's too late to call the RCTC office, so he'll have to call someone at home. He is not eager to do this story. "Metrolink (the commuter rail service) could have waited, but because of the crowds at the meeting (public hearing) I have to write the story," he says. Christie has authority which he recognizes; he also sees some validity in her position. While he thinks about whom to call, he rewrites the original action box.

While writing, he begins to fill in blanks, to revise, to try out sentences. Some sentences he keeps, others he eliminates, and others he rewrites several times.

He tries new word orders, rearranges paragraphs. The first item is about the election of the new vice chair and appointment of a new commissioner. As he writes, he tries to keep the focus on one person at a time to minimize his own and a reader's confusion. He revises this item frequently to get the right balance. He's writing under tight limits; if he were writing a full story, he'd have space to recap the commissioner's resignation as the reason for electing a new vice chair and appointing a commissioner to replace her. But instead he must condense all this information, so he chooses his words carefully.

He repeats the process with the second item, rewriting phrases, clauses, whole sentences repeatedly. For example, he writes "which would have housed the agency" as an adjective clause in a main clause. He rearranges the original main clause and rewrites the subordinate in a new sentence; now it's a participial phrase and its importance has been diminished in favor of another idea: "In addition to housing the agency, surplus space could be leased . . . " The paragraph takes shape as trial phrases are reviewed and often replaced. He turns to his notes and the supporting material for details, facts, a correct spelling, a corroboration of his memory.

Much of the action box original draft is deleted so that new information can be inserted. For example, the third item in the draft had been a brief note about Family Service Association's grant to expand bus service in an area west of Riverside known as Jurupa. Now it is substantially rewritten so that details such as the specific communities to be served can be listed. He is also careful to report the amount the FSA was originally granted, and how much was added by RCTC's latest action. This item is not only expanded, but it moves to top billing in the box.



He must then add Highway 86 to the content of the box. And because it was not in his draft, he must dig facts out of his mind and the notes he took during and after the meeting. He also finds a copy of the morning newspaper so he can read the story on B-1. Four fairly succinct sentences emerge after much writing and rewriting. One of them reads: "The commission acknowledged that additional environmental studies would have to be done that could delay construction of deadly Highway 86." He pondered it, and then revised it by adding "on desert wetlands" to make specific where the environmental studies would be done. He also added the word "further," so that the final version sent to the Metro Desk reads: "The commission acknowledged that additional environmental studies would have to be done on desert wetlands that could delay further construction of deadly Highway 86." Each revision was for clarity and brevity; he could insert thoughts into one sentence rather than writing additional sentences to express them. As I watched, I wondered when he would clarify "construction of deadly Highway 86" which struck me as a case of a misplaced modifier. The highway *is* deadly; the construction is to change that, improve its condition. And the highway has been constructed. A reader would assume that the state is not funding construction of a deadly highway, but rather construction of a less hazardous highway. As an observer I said nothing, but was curious about whether an editor would change it. My questions and his work were moot; the entire item was eliminated, because, Christie explained the next day "it wasn't different enough [from the article which ran on B-1]. Ernest should have rewritten it."

Once he completed writing and revising the items in the box, he rearranged their order. He also ran the "spell check" and combed his notes for the correct

spelling of each person's name. To cue the editors that he had checked these details, he inserted "cq" (a symbol meaning verified) in notes mode behind each name. The story then moved electronically to the Metro Desk.

Ernest began his work on the Pierce Street station story with information in notes mode, typing in the word "storyline" and then a summary of the article. The words "what's new" were followed by one line as a suggested headline. Ernest explained that the preview notes, recently added requirements for reporters, were an effort to make headlines more accurate.

Preliminaries over, Ernest turned to the real work—finding a source who would explain and elaborate the issue. He dialed two or three phone numbers; no answers. "I'm striking out," he said. He went back to his notes, remembered Alex Clifford, the Riverside councilman who had spoken that afternoon about the neighborhood's protest over the station. Clifford answered the phone, Ernest asked a few questions, and turned back to the story in progress saying "I can relax now; I was thinking 'what am I gonna do [if I can't find someone]?"

It's now 8 p.m., and the story is well underway. He works for another half hour or so, sends it to the desk for editing, and nearly twelve hours after walking into the Press-Enterprise, leaves for home.

### Editing the story

When Ernest left the Press-Enterprise, he'd done what many reporters do: covered a meeting or event, returned to the office, conferred with an editor and written the story. He followed the conventions of his discourse community to write the action box items in an abbreviated style, and the short article as a traditional "inverted pyramid," the basic news format.

Ernest can be assigned to cover topics besides transportation; he also works on longer “project” stories. Regardless of the topic, all copy goes from his hands to those of the editor for final revision. His own revision takes place at various points in the process. When Ernest reviewed the agenda of the RCTC meeting, for example, he had a mental list of possible stories. These were discussed with Christie, and together they revised the list from individual stories to a round-up summary. With the working format in mind, Ernest could then continue to revise as he gathered information (how much do I need for a brief?), as he listened to the discussion at the meeting (is this news? is it as big an item as we anticipated? smaller?), and as he did the actual writing following the meeting. Rewriting is a way of life for reporters who must think in terms of space and focus; how many inches do I have to tell this story and what are the most important details in it?

When writing a story, the internal editor’s voice helps the reporter decide what to include and what to omit. If there’s time, a story with questions may be returned to the reporter for revision. Or the editor may simply call the reporter and ask about a term or a fact or a confusing sentence. In these cases, final revision is not simply the editor rearranging clauses or eliminating statements; it’s a collaborative effort of the reporter and editor.

When Ernest left the building on July 14, however, he left the stories for the Metro Desk, knowing he’d see the results of the editing the next morning. One item in the action box was eliminated (Highway 86), and two were trimmed to about half of their original length. All of this Ernest said was “just tinkering. Typically on those articles the editing is tinkering because they’re routine and do not contain a lot of complexity.” He has invested time in the articles—an entire

day was spent on the RCTC meeting and its newspaper summary. But he has not invested much of his ego. He reserves his soul for longer, more complicated stories he calls "projects." For those, editing is more critical because "it might be delicate from a legal angle, or it might be one in which I've invested creativity in the approach or angle. Or if I'm describing a trend, interpreting," the editing is no longer "routine" or "just tinkering." He admits that he's elated when those "get by" without much change, but he knows "they're more likely to get intense editing."

Why are articles revised? The most obvious reasons are limited space and poor writing. An article that arrives at the Metro Desk five inches over its assigned length will inevitably be trimmed if space cannot be found, or if editors think the additional length adds no substance to the article. Poor writing is revised generally for the sake of clarity. Some editors are especially watchful for jargon, weeding it from sentences and replacing it with language they believe will be better understood by readers. In other cases, poor writing is a symptom of poor reporting. Not enough information has been gathered and the reporter is still trying to understand the issues involved.

Editors admit they do not always agree on the shape an article takes. Christie, for example, said she would have left in a phrase another editor cut from the RCTC action box. Ernest had written that Susan Cornelison, the commissioner who resigned July 1, had applied for a paid position with the agency. As published, the sentence ended before the "had applied for a paid position with the agency," a phrase Christie called "relevant," adding, "It was news and it wasn't mentioned." She did agree with the decision to cut an item drastically, saying "it should have been [cut]; there was too much detail."

From Ernest's comments during the RCTC meeting, it was clear that his concern was for the reader. Because the commission's work affects every citizen of the county, there was no question that the meeting would be reported. But Ernest must translate the code words frequently chosen to express commission business, and he interprets the technical information in the interest of reader understanding.

Christie, too, displayed a concern for readers, invoking their interests beyond the meeting—what are the ramifications of the decisions a group like RCTC makes? If the commission, for example, decided to build a commuter station in an unpopular place, Christie wanted to be able to say that the Press-Enterprise had covered the story in detail. The final decision would not be a surprise because readers had watched the issue develop. Then the newspaper—whether it agreed with the RCTC's action or not—would have done its job: informing readers about actions or impending decisions which affect them directly.

In a sense, all revision comes back to the basic question: is this news? And if the answer is "yes," editors and reporters ask "are all the pieces in place so that a reader can understand it?" But the problem is that, as in so many other situations where decisions have to be made, hidden behind "what is news" is a whole raft of questions which editors and reporters grapple with.

One of those is "does it meet publication standards?" Joe Happ uses this term frequently. Among the traditional newspaper publication standards which every reporter and editor adheres to are the needs to quote a credible source, and verify all facts. Happ used a current news item to illustrate. March Air Force Base in Moreno Valley has been a significant part Riverside County's culture and economy for 50 years. For months, rumors filtered into the newsroom that

March was on the list of military bases to be closed. It had not appeared on the official list, and Happ said, "we couldn't get anyone to go on record." Without the sanction of an official source—either the base commission's listing, the word from the Pentagon or a local congressional representative—the newspaper could not print the rumor as confirmed fact. Editors also make decisions based on legal definitions of slander and libel, and on ethical standards.

Broder writes that editors have "tough" jobs because

. . . they are constantly juggling story possibilities, never knowing which ones will collapse and which ones will be added  
. . . They are chained to their editing desks and to the telephones linking them to the reporters out on their beats. They operate under the twin tyrants of space and time. There is never enough room to treat all the stories fully, and they must deal with frustrated (and egotistical) reporters who want more space. They also have to whip and goad reporters, who always want to make one more call to check one more source, to get to their word processors and meet the copydesk's nonnegotiable deadline (311).

In my observation of Ernest and Christie at work, I did not see all of the underlying tensions and frustrations that they and other writers and editors contend with daily. It may be that because an outsider was watching, their collaboration was more polished and less confrontational than it would have been without an audience. Even with that possibility, Ernest-at-work demonstrates the validity of Flower's assertions that "cognitive action is often initiated in response to a cue from the environment" (287). As Ernest listened to the



commission, his mental debate (at times made audible) was continuous: "What does this mean to a newspaper reader? Is it news?" Flower also asserts, "Context guides cognition in multiple ways . . . Context selectively taps knowledge and triggers specific processes" (287) easily seen in Ernest's application of various reportorial skills—studying the information packet, making phone calls for background information, matching the present agenda with earlier ones, comparing his conclusions with that of his editor.

Finally, Flower asserts "Context also guides action by setting the criteria by which a text or even one's own thinking process is monitored and evaluated . . . context cues actions by suggesting appropriate strategies" (288). Ernest's use of a schema—a rough draft written in advance of the meeting, based on what he and his editor had agreed would be the substance of the meeting, most clearly show the use of an "appropriate strategy." And Christie's voice (the internal discourse community) as well as Ernest's familiarity with both reporting and the RCTC's issues and personalities guided the way he considered the newsworthiness of each item as it was presented. The criteria for newswriting, set by the external discourse community, have become "instincts" for Ernest, allowing him to quickly judge what and how he will write about a topic.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Composition researchers and teachers alike have discovered that revision, to most students, means simply correcting errors of grammar and punctuation. In their pursuit of superficial changes, students rarely rethink their statements, develop and extend their ideas or consider the reader's needs. Sondra Perl (1979) studied "unskilled college writers" and concluded that for them, revision meant repair of sentences or misspelled words, rather than revision of meaning or development of ideas. Additionally, Perl found that these writers were "ego-centric," writing to complete the assignment for a decent grade, rather than to communicate meaning to a reader (332). And yet, professional writers and composition instructors believe that revision is most profound when the writer holds a reader in mind. In this process, writing goes from draft to draft, each time accompanied by additional thinking, creating, perhaps researching, and specific rewriting to clarify and increase a reader's understanding of the ideas presented.

At a newspaper, the reader is often invoked: "will the reader care [about this issue]?" and "will the reader understand?" are basic concerns. The reader, as we have seen, is a member of the newsroom discourse community. Readers are real: they call and write the newspaper expressing disgust, disagreement, delight and confusion in response to articles. But how does a beginning writer develop this awareness of a reader? How does a student, whose primary audience for essays has been "the teacher" and motivation for revision has been a grade, learn to write to communicate ideas? Collaborative classroom strategies may be one answer.

Consider the collaboration which occurs when a class of twenty or twenty-five is broken into groups of three or four to exchange drafts. Writers take turns becoming readers; each reader talks about what he or she finds in the draft, while the writer talks about what he/she *wanted* the reader to find in the draft. Feedback has not only made the reader a reality, but has shown the writer the location of gaps between what was in his/her mind and what is on the page. And feedback—whether from another student or from the instructor—demonstrates the need for revision, a part of the writing process beginning writers often overlook or avoid. And while Janet Emig (1983) believes that “by the time most of us are adults, we have internalized the process of revision, which can be described as the outcome of a dialogue between ourselves as writer and ourselves as audience . . . ” (66), this is not always the case. Either the student has not received instructive response, or has treated each essay as a singular experience, failing to generate Emig’s internalized writer-reader dialogue. In a discourse community (a collaborative classroom), the external dialogue—peer groups discussing drafts and revision strategies—provides the model Emig envisions. Writers analyze and discuss writing, and in so doing, alternate between the role of writer and audience (reader). Peer group discussions demonstrate the value of revision: when a classmate stumbles over the meaning of a sentence or paragraph, his or her questions point to weaknesses in the writing. Ideally, these questions lodge in the writer’s mind and in time, the once external discussions are carried on mentally, the writer talking to him or herself as both writer and reader.

Writers whose revision is genuine, confident and self-directed is a worthwhile goal for any composition course, but only one of many that a community of writers can achieve. Identifying, refining, practicing the conventions of lan-

guage use—where commas go and how to use Modern Language Association citations—are also responsibilities of the writing classroom-as-discourse-community. Consider Bartholomae's assertion once again; each student encountering academic conventions for the first time must "invent" them. But within a discourse community, a student can not only learn ("invent") the conventions, but apply them with understanding. Put another way, a classroom working as a whole and in small groups, authors and "owns" these conventions. It is a discourse community at work—using language in a particular way to achieve its communications goals—and in the end, a discourse community which becomes the internal dialogue the writer turns to when writing and revising his/her work.

Freed and Broadhead call a discourse community a culture which establishes paradigms (156). The discourse community/culture's conventions or paradigms are analogous to the schemata which Robert Glaser (1984) defines as learning strategies (101). Discourse paradigms, schemata or conventions are programmed responses to communication tasks. Just as the news writer receives an assignment for a hard news or feature story and immediately visualizes its form and its linguistic requirements, a student formulates a similar response to classroom assignments to write expository or interpretive essays. In sum, the purpose of a classroom as discourse community is multi-layered: to give students a vocabulary for discussing writing, a tangible reader-writer relationship for those discussions, an environment for inventing and practicing the conventions of writing which can lead to development of essay paradigms. Repeated application of the paradigms (schemata) will allow students to write essays for history, psychology or sociology classes. In effect, the external discourse community (the classroom and/or the peer group) is internalized. It continues to affect the writer—to

speak to him/her—long after the course has been completed.

While composition instructors strive for Emig's ideal—the writer instinctively revising prose based on a reader's needs—most are realistic enough to know that students will continue to believe in the “first perfect draft” myth. Students will, even though practicing the writing process as they turn in required drafts and revisions, assume that eventually they will be able to write just like the news writers in the movies who dictate an article over the phone which appears word for word in print. In practice, however, Hollywood's script writers revise and rewrite, as do the news writers they depict.

The functional reality of a newsroom discourse community raises thought-provoking ideas and questions for composition teachers. Among them are the following:

1. Writers work with at least two constraints in a newsroom: their work is most often demanded within hours of the assignment, and it must meet a length requirement. Thus writing and rewriting are limited and defined by these time and space boundaries. At the same time, the newsroom-as-discourse community functions efficiently because of this imposed pressure. It forces the community to invent ways to work together and make use of formulaic solutions to writing problems: genres such as spot news, features, sidebars, profiles, and action boxes are employed.

For composition teachers, there are corresponding space and time limitations, the most obvious the physical length of the course. While this may be a cause for complaint (“I can never get everything done” and “Can students learn to write effectively in one semester?”), the reality of time limitations may also be used as the foundation of a schedule by which students learn not only time management,

but the most efficient ways to organize their ideas in order to communicate them to others. And just as news writers learn to write spot news or features by repeatedly using basic formats, student writers repeatedly writing expository or analytical essays may develop facility with these forms. Real classroom deadlines imitate real world writing conditions. My own experience may serve to illustrate the value of schedules.

In a sixteen-week semester, I require four 250-word essays in the first five weeks. With the course syllabus, students receive written descriptions of the assignments as well as the deadlines for all three drafts which they will write for each of the four early essays, and the longer assignments which follow. They are pushed to draft, discuss, revise, submit the work for my comments, revise again, and submit the essay for an evaluation in a matter of days. I allow class-time for pre-writing activities such as freewriting, class and small-group brainstorming sessions. But students are responsible for completing the writing process quickly (mimicking newsroom conditions) and repeatedly (another newsroom requirement). Writing the four short essays establishes a work paradigm for the semester which stands students in good stead for the three longer essays and research project spread over the remaining weeks.

2. In a newsroom discourse community, assignments are thoroughly discussed. Writers with a genuine understanding of their task do a better job than those who are only vaguely familiar with the way to approach or write a particular assignment. In the newsroom, conferences continue until the reporter grasps the assigned task and the editor knows what to expect when it's completed.

In the classroom, answering the inevitable "What do you want on this essay?" or "Could you repeat the assignment?" questions parallels the editor-reporter



conversation. I distribute written descriptions of essay assignments, and in class discussions, clarify fine points of each in turn. Other instructors spend time clarifying and discussing general and specific rhetorical tasks, allowing the class to “talk themselves” into an understanding of their next steps. Whatever the classroom strategy, the belief that a writer’s confidence is based on his/her understanding of the task is an important one for instructors. Because individuals learn in different ways, various opportunities for each student to develop understanding must be offered. Topic brainstorming in small groups or by the class as a whole, freewriting in response to a prose model, discussion of the details of a student essay from a previous semester are among ways to reach different students.

3. Talking about ideas tests them. At The Press-Enterprise when writer Ernest “pitched” ideas to editor Christie, her response helped him determine whether the idea was good, bad, clear, muddy, underdeveloped, worth pursuing, or of no interest to readers now. Their discussion dictated his next step.

Students also need opportunities to test their ideas. More than one student has handed in a four-page essay whose thesis, and best idea, is in the conclusion. In effect, the student has done his/her thinking on paper, submitting a “discovery draft,” to use Donald Murray’s term. Testing an essay’s ideas in conversation with other students and/or with the instructor is appealing to students who like to “talk through” their ideas before writing a first draft. Similar conversations based on a completed draft may be more useful to students who think on paper. At a teaching workshop, one instructor described this method for generating topic ideas: He requires that all essays be written in response to prose models which the class discusses. Students submit their topic choices for his

approval. The lists lead to conferences in which he may suggest modifications, or question the student until he's sure the topic is focused and specific. Not only does this process produce a set of essays on different topics, but he believes they are of distinctly better quality because the student has spent time thinking about and discussing the topic; it fits his/her interests (Bourgstein 1993). Strategies such as these which help a writer examine the strength and focus of ideas duplicate the newsroom discourse community in a classroom.

4. The newsroom has a clearly defined process, one by which all members of its discourse community operate. It is outlined for newcomers, and daily repetition reinforces their familiarity with it. The process also defines the purpose for which all members of the newsroom discourse community are employed: to write and publish a newspaper.

Writing teachers must ask themselves whether students understand the writing process or the classroom requirements for drafting and rewriting. Is it simply imposed on students or is it, through practice, made valuable to them? The more a process is used, the greater the chance that it will become routine. News writers work under the pressure of inflexible deadlines; they must rely on a writing process which is second nature. They become efficient, confident writers. Well organized class procedures function as a form of security: students know what to expect, and they can use the process with increasing confidence, while helping classmates to do the same. At the beginning of the term, for example, an instructor might establish this routine for submitting essays: first draft is brought to a workshop with peers; with those peer comments, it is revised and submitted as a second draft. After the instructor's review of the second draft, the essay is revised once again and submitted as a third draft, this time for a grade.

Repeating this routine with each assignment teaches students to follow a process of writing and revising and rewriting that ideally becomes a paradigm students apply to any writing assignment.

5. The newsroom as sanctuary is a concept worth considering for, and recreating in, the writing classroom. Reporters can test their ideas without fear of public scrutiny, and talk about their frustrations with understanding colleagues.

Do students feel comfortable talking about their ideas? Are they timid about letting others read their work or speaking up in class? The “sanctuary” atmosphere must be cultivated and developed by an instructor in at least two ways: first an instructor serves as a model for peer group commentary. The instructor clarifies the standards and vocabulary for discussing drafts not only by marginal comments on individual essays, but by discussing with the whole class a list of ways students can talk about writing as peers. To reinforce these do’s and don’t’s, an instructor may ask three or four students to role play a peer review session. Commentary by the instructor and the class emphasizes the value of constructive criticism and discourages the tendency to edit misspelled words rather than unclear ideas. Just as importantly in establishing a sanctuary for writers, the instructor encourages experimentation and risk-taking. An atmosphere which says “it’s OK to make mistakes, and it’s OK to stretch your writing muscles” produces creative discussion and creative writing more often than not.

6. Newsroom staff speak the same language; their use of specialized terms allows them to accomplish work efficiently. Everyone in the newsroom discourse community knows the difference between a “feature” and an “editorial,” and operates within those boundaries when writing one or the other. The common language also facilitates discussions between reporters and editors, between

reporters and reporters, between newsroom personnel and production staff.

Students must be given the chance to develop a vocabulary which helps them talk about writing. From the first discussions about writing, an instructor introduces students to a means of expressing ideas about writing, a foreign language to most beginning writers. Having the language to discuss writing empowers students to talk about conceptualizing, expressing and developing ideas more productively. And it enables them to improve their own writing and/or better understand the task. A simple example may illustrate: Instructors are fond of writing “develop” in the margin of essays. A student may read “develop” and wonder “what should I do? Start over? Make this sentence clearer? Find different examples?” An exercise in developing an idea expressed in a simple topic sentence—done in small groups or by the class as a whole—will illustrate that “develop” means “add detail, amplify, expand, define, fill out and provide the reader with enough depth to understand the idea.” Now that “develop” has meaning in a writing context, the student can use his/her time to add information to the paragraph that will fulfill the instructor’s—or peer’s—request for elaboration.

7. Immediate feedback is a valuable way to learn. Editors do not wait several days to respond to reporters’ work. The lines of communication are open. A story is read while it’s still fresh in the mind of the reporter, who also recalls the interview(s) and other research on which it was based. This makes the revision task clearer and less onerous.

As noted, most students do not understand revision. They persist in viewing “revision” as cleaning up a draft’s “errors.” One classroom strategy to provide immediate feedback has been discussed: students working in small groups

exchange drafts (written in or out of class), discuss their work and discover with real readers where their ideas are weak, incomprehensible or confusing. They are then better able to revise; they've tested their written ideas and found the need to revise.

Students grumble about teachers who collect essay drafts, stow them in a briefcase, and three weeks later, return them with cryptic remarks. By then the assignment is a fuzzy memory. The writing is old, stale and flat; the student's initial enthusiasm is gone, and revision becomes drudgery. Busy instructors can substitute tape recorded commentary for marginal notes, verbalizing their response while reading the essay. Instructors may also emulate editors who scrutinize drafts with the reporter sitting close by. The "talk through" permits the writer to hear in the reader's tone of voice responses that say "that's confusing" or "that's good." In-class conferences between instructor and student can be equally productive, as the student annotates the draft, underlining sentences that are incomplete, unclear or impossibly muddled, and marking the paragraphs which are clear.

8. Asking questions forces the writer to rethink the ideas he/she is trying to express. Editors ask hundreds of specific and direct questions to guide revision: "where's the lead?" or "what's the plain English for this jargon?"

Questions written in margins or posed aloud by members of a writer's peer group or instructor can be effective not only in defining what the revision must accomplish, but in provoking thinking. In a sense, the questions lead to brainstorming for ways to restate, clarify, expand and develop ideas. More importantly questions put the responsibility for rethinking and reshaping ideas on the writer and not on the reader. It's easy for an instructor to revise a student's

garbled sentence, but it hardly teaches revision. It's easy to circle a misplaced comma and replace it with a semi-colon, but doing so shortcuts the student's review of punctuation rules. Questions prompt exploration and re-vision of ideas.

9. In the newsroom discourse community, decision-makers are active in the process. To the extent that it is practical, editors collaborate with reporters rather than dictating or making demands. But a reporter seldom has to guess what an editor expects; there is ample time to discuss the initial idea and the written result. The editor makes suggestions, is open to creative angles, and fosters a working relationship with reporters who report to his or her desk.

Instructors may wish to delegate more of the revision decision making to student writers and their peers. And appropriately so; after all, whose writing is it? But the instructor whose grading policies are mysterious, or whose requirements for an essay are obtuse—or worse, whose requirements change—is not being fair, and in fact, is impeding the writing process. A discourse community where there is distrust or silence is not functioning efficiently, and may not be functioning at all. An instructor can be forthcoming about grading standards and essay requirements without giving up authority.

The newsroom, or any other discourse communities rooted in the marketplace, may seem remote when inside a college classroom. Admittedly, the newsroom as discourse community is not the ideal model for every composition classroom. After all, it is a collection of experienced professionals who have daily opportunities to practice their skills and who are paid to do so. They are motivated not only by the very real economic benefits of their job, but by an inherent drive to communicate through the medium of a newspaper. They have



chosen to be writers; they are not forced, by a college curriculum, to be at their desks.

But many of the strategies which a newsroom discourse community employs to publish a new product each day may trigger questions for the composition discourse community to ponder. And perhaps to borrow.

Freed and Broadhead are right—the newsroom discourse community both defines and limits the writer. The vocabulary is prescribed, as is the format. There are checks and balances, standards imposed by both the local community and the industry as a whole. The news writer is not a free agent; he or she cannot invent the facts of his or her story, nor can the reporter dictate the length or position of the article within the newspaper. And the longer a writer is a member of this community, the more his or her writing reflects its conventions.

And yet, newsrooms attract new writers by the adrenaline-pumping challenge of responding to emergencies with concise, clear prose. Over time, it turns them into disciplined journeywomen and journeymen writers.

A college community also attracts new students, and like the newsroom, limits them as writers. It imposes academic language conventions on those who might, under other circumstances, express themselves in slang arranged in sentences punctuated by an Emily Dickinson system of dashes. College composition courses require that writers meet deadlines. By functioning as discourse communities, they teach the need for revision. By acting as sanctuaries, they allow writers to take risks and grow.

Discourse communities are paradoxical: on the one hand, they impose conventions and demand conformity to systems. On the other hand, they provide a secure environment where writers are free to experiment. They are boundaries

and horizons, they are external and internal. Discourse communities, whether inside or outside of academia, are worth continued study. Until composition instructors complete a course without hearing "I don't understand what you want on this essay" or "what do you mean this isn't an 'A' paper?" we cannot be said to have found all the answers. Perhaps we can discover them by listening to the conversation of writers.

## Appendix A

Note: Words with lines through them are in "notes mode"—visible on the screen and on a draft print-out, but invisible when set in type for publication. Typesetting symbols such as EL24 which refers to the space between typeset lines, "ufaction" which is code for "use format action box" are also visible here.

### Draft of "Action Box" written before the meeting of the Riverside County Transportation Commission on July 14, 1993

[EL24]

^

[el4]

[ufaction—newfmt—usr]

RIVERSIDE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION^

~~[el4]~~

Headline here bold-ital

[el4]

First item here

[el4]

Headline here bold-ital

[el4]

Next item here

[el4]

[el4]

~~Other actions~~

[el4][dr.5,s5]

[el4]

Vice chairperson elected: The commission unanimously elected ?? ?? to replace Susan Cornelison as vice-chairwoman. Cornelison resigned July 1 and has applied for a paid position with the agency. The commission also decided to accept ?? applications to replace Cornelison as the only public-at-large member of the governing body.

[el4]

Bicycle trails: Extensions of three to six months were granted Blythe, San Jacinto and Temecula for developing bicycle and pedestrian trails in their jurisdictions. Money was allotted [sic] by the commission for the projects. The cities said they have been delayed for a variety of reasons, including flood damage, staffing and planning problems. Even with the extensions, the trails still would be completed this year.

[el4]

New commission offices: The commission voted to file a file a [sic] joint application with the City of Riverside for federal transportation funds up to \$4.5 million to buy the historical Iron Works Building in the Riverside Marketplace development. The commission would match that with up to \$600,000 in local money.

Birtcher Development is offering the 2.88-acre site and 32,000-square-foot building for about \$2.3 million. Improvements land renovations [sic] would bring the total cost to roughly \$5 million. The site is near the downtown Riverside Metrolink station, which opened for service to Los Angeles June 14.

## Appendix A, continued

The application would consume most, if not all, of the \$6 million allotted [sic] Riverside County in the next cycle of this special federal funding. And the cost over the next 20 years? [sic] could be double that of leasing the agency's current space.

Officials said, however, that using federal money would save about \$2.8 million in local Measure A tax revenue and other money ~~for other~~ projects over the 16 years remaining in the life of Measure A. That money could then be used for other projects.

Furthermore, the commission could earn about \$6 million leasing surplus space in the Iron Works Building over the same time.

The commission also extended its lease one year for office space on University Avenue.

The budget and finance sub-committee recommended against approval.

[el4]

People with disabilities: Family Services Association of Western Riverside County was granted \$77,500, in addition to \$12,500 already granted, to help operate two buses for people with disabilities in the 1993-94 years. Family Services had asked for \$100,000.

[el4]

^

[UFcredit,25p4]Compiled by staff writer Ernest E. Pund

[el24]

(END)

## Appendix B

Note: Words with lines through them are in "notes mode"—visible on the screen and on a draft print-out, but invisible when set in type for publication. Typesetting symbols are also visible here (see Appendix A note for explanation). The "cq" notation following names is a reporter or editor's signal that the spelling of the name has been checked and is accurate.

### Draft of "Action Box" rewritten following the meeting of the Riverside County Transportation Commission on July 14, 1993

[el24]

^

[el4]

[ufaction—newfmt—usr]

RIVERSIDE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION^

~~[el4]~~

People with disabilities

~~[el4]~~

Family Services Association of Western Riverside County was granted enough money to extend its bus service for seniors and people with disabilities to Sundays.

The private non-profit association offers the reservation service in Rubidoux, Belltown, Pedley, Glen Avon, Sunnyslope and Mira Loma Monday through Saturday.

The commission increased the association's annual funding from \$75,500 to \$100,000 to expand the service. The money comes from Measure A, the half-cent sales tax surcharge approved by voters in 1988 for transportation projects.

~~[el4]~~

New commissioner named

~~[el4]~~

The commission unanimously named Coachella Valley accountant Russ Beiricheq to replace Susan Cornelisoncq as the only public-at-large member of the commission. Cornelison resigned July 1 and has applied for a paid position with the agency.

Beirich, a partner in the firm of Lund & Guttrycq, was Cornelison's alternate in the event she was absent. The commission now will accept applications for a new alternate.

Commissioner and Riverside County Supervisor Patricia "Corky" Larson was elected to replace Susan Cornelison as vice-chairwoman of the commission.

[el4]

[el4]

Other actions

[el4][dr.5,s5]

[elr]

Highway 86: The commission acknowledged that additional environmental studies would have to be done on desert wetlands that could delay further construction of deadly Highway 86 in the Coachella Valley for one to two years.

Rep. Al McCandless, R-LaQuinta, made a similar acknowledgment earlier this week.

The additional studies are being required by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The commission also formally requested that Caltrans in the mean time provide signals and other safety measures to guard against accidents along the highway, which have proven fatal for several people this year.

[el4]

## Appendix B, continued

New home shelved: the commission shelved a proposal to buy the historical Iron Works Building in the Riverside Marketplace development near the new Riverside Metrolink station.

Under the proposal, the commission would have filed a joint application with the City of Riverside for federal transportation funds up to \$4.5 million to buy the property and renovate the building. The commission would have matched that with up to \$600,000 in local money. However a city official said the total cost would be about half that.

In addition to housing the agency, surplus space could be leased, generating new money for transportation projects, agency staff recommended.

Commissioners, however, said they were concerned about the risk of being a landlord in depressed economic times, among other things. They also said that buying the building would compete with other transportation projects in the county hoping to capture some of the special federal funding.

[el4]

[UFcredit,25p4]Compiled by staff writer Ernest E. Pund

[el24]



## Appendix C

Note: Words with lines through them are in "notes mode"—visible on the screen and on a draft print-out, but invisible when set in type for publication. Typesetting symbols are also visible here, as are editorial signals such as "cq" meaning spelling has been checked and "fetched" which means the article has been picked up by an editor for use in a different edition. In this case, the story appeared in seven editions of The Press-Enterprise.

### "Action Box" as edited for publication in The Press-Enterprise July 15, 1993

~~STORY FETCHED BY BLACKS ON 14 JUL 93, 22:01, NEW NAME IS S15TRANBO BLACKS~~ ~~USR~~  
~~STORY FETCHED BY BLACKS ON 14 JUL 93, 22:00, NEW NAME IS T15TRANBO BLACKS~~ ~~USR~~  
~~STORY FETCHED BY REINSE ON 14 JUL 93, 21:35, NEW NAME IS M15TRANBO REINSE~~ ~~USR~~  
~~STORY FETCHED BY REINSE ON 14 JUL 93, 21:33, NEW NAME IS H15TRANBO REINSE~~ ~~USR~~  
~~STORY FETCHED BY GODFRE ON 14 JUL 93, 21:16, NEW NAME IS R15TRANBO GODFRE~~ ~~USR~~

~~STORY FETCHED BY TAYLOR ON 14 JUL 93, 21:04, NEW NAME IS D15TRANBO TAYLOR~~ ~~USR~~

~~STORY FETCHED BY TAYLOR ON 14 JUL 93, 21:03, NEW NAME IS C15TRANBO TAYLOR~~ ~~USR~~

read by clarke

[el24]

^

[el4]

[ufaction—newfmt—usr]

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION^

{el4}

People with disabilities

{el4}

The Riverside County Transportation Commission granted additional money to Family Services Association of Western Riverside County ~~was granted enough money~~ to extend its bus service for seniors and people with disabilities to Sundays.

The private non-profit association offers the reservation service in Rubidoux, Belltown, Pedley, Glen Avon, Sunnyslope and Mira Loma Monday through Saturday.

The commission increased the association's annual funding from \$75,500 to \$100,000. ~~to expand the service.~~ The money comes from Measure A, the half-cent sales tax surcharge approved by voters in 1988 for transportation projects.

{el4}

New commissioner named

{el4}

The commission unanimously named Coachella Valley accountant Russ Beiricheq to replace Susan Cornelisoncq as the only public-at-large member of the commission. Cornelison resigned July 1. ~~and has applied~~ for a paid position with the agency. Beirich, a partner in the firm of Lund & Guttrycq, was Cornelison's alternate. ~~in the event she was absent.~~ The commission ~~now~~ will accept applications for a new alternate.

~~Commissioner and Riverside County Supervisor Patricia "Corky" LarLarsonLarson was elected to replace Susan Cornelison as vice-chairwoman of the commission.~~

## Appendix C, continued

[el4]

[el4]

Other actions

[el4][dr.5,s5]

~~we had this today. leave in notes~~

[el4]

Highway 86: The commission acknowledged that additional environmental studies would have to be done on desert wetlands that could delay further construction of deadly Highway 86 in the Coachella Valley for one to two years.

Rep. Al McCandless, R-LaQuinta, made a similar acknowledgment earlier this week.

The additional studies are being required by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers.

~~The commission also formally requested that Caltrans in the mean time provide signals and other safety measures to guard against accidents along the highway, which have proven fatal for several people this year.~~

[el4]

New home shelved: the commission shelved a proposal to buy the historical Iron Works Building in the Riverside Marketplace development near the new Riverside Metrolink station to be used for a new headquarters.

Commissioners expressed concern about becoming landlords in a depressed market and possibly taking federal grant money — up to \$4.5 million — from competing local transportation projects.

~~Under the proposal, the commission would have filed a joint application with the City of Riverside for federal transportation funds up to \$4.5 million to buy the property and renovate the building. The commission would have matched that with up to \$600,000 in local money. However a city official said the total cost would be about half that.~~

In addition to housing the agency, surplus space could be leased, generating new money for transportation projects, agency staff recommended.

Commissioners, however, said they were concerned about the risk of being a landlord in depressed economic times, among other things. They also said that buying the building would compete with other transportation projects in the county hoping to capture some of the special federal funding.

[el4]

[UFcredit,25p4]Compiled by staff writer Ernest E. Pund

[el24]

## Appendix C, continued

Here is the way the "Action Box" appeared to Press-Enterprise readers on July 15, 1993

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# TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

## People with disabilities

The Riverside County Transportation Commission granted additional money to Family Service Association of Western Riverside County to extend bus service for seniors and people with disabilities to Sundays.

The private non-profit association offers the reservation service in Rubidoux, Belltown, Pedley, Glen Avon, Sunnyslope and Mira Loma Monday through Saturday.

The commission increased the association's annual funding from \$75,500 to \$100,000. The money comes from Measure A, the half-cent sales tax surcharge approved by voters in 1988 for transportation projects.

## New commissioner named

The commission unanimously named Coachella Valley accountant Russ Beirich to replace Susan Cornelison as the only public-at-large member of the commission. Cornelison resigned July 1. Beirich, a partner in the firm of Lund & Guttry, was Cornelison's alternate. The commission will accept applications for a new alternate.

## Other actions

**New home shelved:** The commission shelved a proposal to buy the historic Iron Works Building in the Riverside Marketplace development near the new Riverside Metrolink station to be used for a new headquarters.

Commissioners expressed concern about becoming landlords in a depressed market and possibly taking federal grant money — up to \$4.5 million — from competing local transportation projects.

*Compiled by staff writer Ernest E. Pund*

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